



## **Transnational Identities in a Digital Age: A Case Study of Niue**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Certain portions of data and findings from this research was also published in the following journal article prior to the completion of this thesis. Journal Article: Anayo J and Horst HA. (2016) Technologies of the nation: *Public Wi-Fi and the demand for more in Niue*. Information Technologies & International Development 12: pp. 1-9.

All images in this thesis are original photos or screen-shots taken during fieldwork, unless otherwise stated. Permissions were sought to take photos in participant observation settings and events. Permissions were sought to use social media posts which were not set as 'public'.

Throughout this thesis all research participants have been given pseudonyms.

Jennifer Frances Anayo

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## **Abstract:**

Niue is a small island developing state in the South Pacific, in free association with New Zealand. Freedom of movement between the two nations has resulted in a transnational negotiation of what Niueans say it means to be Niuean. This negotiation has in large part been enabled and supported by digital media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In this thesis I seek to understand how digital media is shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities, utilising a multi-sited ethnographic approach that explores the transnational contexts that these transpire. It examines the interwoven factors involved in building 'nation' and maintaining 'cultural identity,' shaped by agendas and anxieties around 'preservation,' which I demonstrate occurs both on- and off-line. Throughout this thesis I introduce the concept of *digital transnationalism* as a new lens to understand how digital media are changing people's ability to create and maintain connections (although from a distance) and to negotiate notions of 'being' versus 'belonging' to the physical and ephemeral spaces of Niuean identity. I explore the implications of these concepts and processes.

## **Chapter 1:** *Introducing a Transnational Niue*

### **Introduction**

This thesis engages with the theoretical underpinnings of ‘transnationalism’ in the context of a growing engagement with Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and new media. Using Niue—a small island state in the South Pacific—as a case study, I develop a new lens of investigation, ‘digital transnationalism,’ building on previous work on the lived experiences of transnationalism (Yeoh et al., 2003; Vertovec, 1999; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Mau, 2010; Portes et al., 1999; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998). As a case study for digital transnationalism, this thesis also contributes to the handful of ethnographic investigations of Niue (Basil C.Thomson, 1902; Cook et al., 2001; Cowan, 1923; Pule and Thomas, 2005; Pulekula,1903; Smith, 1902 & 1903; Walsh and Trlin, 1973; Thomas F. Ryan, 1994; Liuvaie, 2006; Thode-Arora, 2007; Williams, 2009; Talagi, 2013; Otto, 2014), and the first qualitative research on the impact of digital media on Niuean transnationalism<sup>1</sup> and identity construction. My research is a unique and original contribution to scholarship which identifies a growing overlap in themes of ‘transnationalism’ and ‘digital media use,’ and the ‘gap’ this creates in the way in which to analyse such research; I propose digital transnationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Within the literature I reviewed, I was unable to find any other research investigating Niuean transnationalism and digital media

My primary research question asks, how digital media are shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities. I draw upon eight months of qualitative research, with half of this time spent with the diasporic Niuean communities in Auckland and half with Niueans on the island of Niue. In addition to the physical places of Niuean sociality, research was conducted in the digital spaces that Niueans frequently traversed, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. In this introductory chapter I provide a brief outline of my overall thesis document, background information about Niue and Niueans, and an introduction to the role of digital media in my research participants' experiences of transnationalism.

This thesis builds upon previous research on the broader field of transnationalism (Yeoh et al., 2003; Vertovec, 1999; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Mau, 2010; Portes et al., 1999; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), in order to examine the difference that 'the digital' has made and the ways in which new media forms have reinforced, extended, and amplified transnational negotiations of culture and identity. Digital transnationalism is primarily concerned with the way digital media interfaces with the politics and daily practices of transnationalism, including the ways in which digital media platforms and their affordances<sup>2</sup> perform an infrastructure, conduit, and materiality of the transnational social field (Levitt and Schiller, 2004)

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<sup>2</sup> 'Affordances' of digital media throughout this thesis refers to the design and interface, of which shape perception, use and interactivity. Popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube were commonly used by my research participants. Though it is not the aim of this thesis to analyse the specificity of each platform and compare affordance, it is important to note that whichever platform or site, my research participants interacted and used these digital media as a place to engage in the negotiation of individual and group identity, and why that kind of engagement was important to them.

experience; developing new ways of engaging in constructions of ‘nation,’ ‘culture,’ and ‘identity.’ This perspective is integral to understanding the degree to which digital media may shape the ‘nation-making,’ ‘cultural revitalisation,’ and ‘cultural reproduction’ activities that are often a large part of transnational life; evident when investigating Niueans.

The conceptual framework of digital transnationalism, brings together the fields of ‘transnationalism,’ ‘long distance nationalism,’ and ‘digital media.’ In this chapter I first introduce the concepts of ‘transnationalism’ and ‘transnational social fields,’ and explain how they relate to notions of identity and expression. I then shift my focus onto the communicative practices of transnational people and the investigation of digital media. I tangentially link ‘long distance nationalism’ to the digital transnationalism framework to highlight the significance of digital media in mediating relationships and shaping identity for transnational individuals and communities. I argue that the increasing overlap of ‘the digital’ in transnational people’s day-to-day calls for a new lens of engagement. Digital transnationalism encompasses the phenomena occurring in the intersection of these themes.

## **Transnational Identities**

Increased mobility and accessibility due to advances in transport and information technologies has spurred academic inquiry into the phenomenon of transnationalism, globalisation, and migration (Basch et al., 1994; Smith, 2001; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2009; Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Mau, 2010). In particular, researchers have explored economic, political, religious, and socio-



cultural practices in identity formation, and how these have increasingly become transnational in 'production' and in geographic reach. Studies of people's experiences of migration have taken a key role in capturing and analysing transnational activities to maintain their relationships and interests; linked by a place of origin, or also often referred to as 'home'.

As discussed by Vertovec (2001), 'transnationalism' as a phenomenon must be investigated together with the concept of 'identity'—linked because of the way many peoples' sense of a commonality of place, cultural practice and language become markers of a group identity, such as 'nation' and or 'culture'. These markers of common identity are brought into relief especially in migration and the physical dislocation from the place of origin of said commonality. Migration to new lands often destabilises everyday practices, values and relationships on which previous understandings of the self and the collective were based.

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is so because, on the one hand, many peoples' transnational networks are grounded upon the perception that they share some form of common identity, often based upon a place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it. Such networks are marked by patterns of communication or exchange of resources and information along with participation in socio-cultural and political activities (Vertovec, 2001: 573).

'Identity' as a concept has long been problematised in the social sciences and field of psychology (for examples see Rouse, 1995; Hannerz, 1996). In this thesis, I use the term to refer to the way which a person may conceive of themselves as

an individual within collective groupings, rather than an investigation of the psychology of personhood. 'Nation' and 'culture' are also quite loaded terms which are particularly integral in my research (which I problematise more in subsequent chapters), but are each discussed acknowledging that these terms refer to a conglomerate of histories and trajectories. Those of which coalesce and are constantly in flux. Place, politics, religion and economics are just a few of the factors which shape and define one's sense of self, and my research participants generously offer their experience of these fluid tensions towards a case study for digital transnationalism. The work to date on transnational identities highlights that there is no simple equation between identity, nationality and ethnicity (Basch et al., 1994; Smith, 2001; Portes et al., 1999; Ommundsen, 2003; Vertovec, 2009; Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Mau, 2010), that identity is not static and that there can be a degree of strategic choice in its formulation; a confluence of many factors. Yet, despite this fluidity, as also seen in my own research, there is evidence that individuals can still refer to belonging to a unique, homogenous cultural identity.

Even since social scientists have been exploring transnationalism and migration since the late 80s and 90s, it seems geographic mobility continues to disrupt definitions of cultural and national identity (Clifford, 1988; Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999; Smith, 2001; Hannerz, 2003), as the cross-border mobility unsettles associations between people and place, often eliciting a longing for 'home' (Lee, 2008; Olwig, 2007; Parham, 2004; Schiller and Fouron, 2001). However, the 'portability of national identity' as described by Sassen (1998) is also layered with the tendency of multiple memberships, especially

with the emergence of second and third generations. The multiple membership affects the construction and negotiation of individual and collective identities—multiple notions of belonging, affecting their everyday perceptions, interactions and decisions. Moving from a ‘bipolar model’ (Rouse, 1991), this multiplicity is what Levitt and Schiller (2004) refer to as a ‘transnational social field’, ‘translocality’ by Appadurai (1995), and ‘transnational social space’ by Pries (1995).

According to Levitt and Schiller and the dynamics within a transnational social field “ways of being refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in... individuals can be embedded in a social field but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field” (Levitt and Schiller, 2004: 1010). However, they argue that ways of belonging are evoked and asserted in “practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group... ways of belonging combine action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies” (Levitt and Schiller, 2004: 1010), such as those who deliberately adopt cultural ‘markers’ to signify their Niuean-ness. Individuals make decisions with regards to navigating transnationalism according to life circumstances and the power dynamics in which the transnational person finds themselves. These decisions are made with reference to an individual’s sense of being and their sense of belonging to a certain social field or organisational structure, especially in diasporic communities and in multicultural cities.

The meaning of 'home', 'culture', and 'identity', is full of contradictions, and impossible to encompass in a single definition. As such, what it means to be Niuean is a complex dialogue as well. One way to view 'Home' can be a concrete location on a map, yet also a set of memories that you carry with you wherever you go. 'Culture' is a way of seeing and being in the world. 'Identity' is individual and collective. As a transnational social field between Niue and New Zealand, Niueans have been wrestling with notions of identity and culture; 'being' verses 'belonging' to 'here' and 'there'. They were wrestling with a sense of nationhood and 'home', though being geographically dispersed and perhaps never stepping foot on the island. This was especially seen in a growing desire for the 'preservation' of Niuean culture and tradition. In my research the Niuean transnational social field were concerned with the maintenance and revitalisation of Niuean history and tradition, language and customs; and digital media became one of the many spaces that these articulations of identity and belonging were being negotiated.

### **Transnationalism: Transcending National Boundaries**

Transnationalism refers to the multiple ties and interactions that link people or institutions across the borders of nation-states. Basch et al. (1994) defines transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link their societies of origin and settlement... [building] social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders" (Pg. 8). National boundaries are negated in one sense (Hannerz, 2003; Clifford, 1988; Appadurai, 1996), yet are also being reinforced and strengthened through transnational practices (Smith, 2001; Anderson, 1991). For example, the large-

scale global reach of many multi-national corporations and brands, the cross-cultural influence of traditional media streams, and bi-lateral political agreements are seen as markers of globalisation and transnationalism. These large-scale governmental and corporate agendas are described by Smith and Guarnizo as bringing influences “from above” (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), whereas personal and relational interactions are seen as being influences from “below.”

Similarly, work on the lived experiences of transnationalism includes research about keeping in contact and parenting from a distance, remittances and sending money back home to the family, as well as engaging in political activism in their home country although living elsewhere (Levitt and Schiller, 2004). Mau (2010) writes of cross-border interactions that transform the day-to-day realities of individuals and social networks. Mau, Levitt Schiller, and Jaworski investigate the degree to which social networks transcend political and geographic boundaries of nation-states by exploring the nature of the transnational social relationships and cross-border mobility (Mau, 2010: 2).

Furthermore, Levitt, Schiller, and Jaworski (2004, 2007) argue for a *transnational social field* perspective and methodology that traces circuits of engagement and describes marketplaces of exchange that are not analysed by how a particular migrant community is behaving in a particular nation-state or geographic location. The transnational social field lens thus focuses on the site of exchange as comprised of more than the geo-location from where the exchanges are occurring. It also assumes that the places of exchange themselves are not

bound by traditional geo-political boundaries, and instead operate within and across several of them (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt and Schiller, 2004). Their argument is particularly poignant in the articulation of the distinction between ways of *being* and *belonging* in and to a social field, versus *being* and *belonging* to a nation state. These themes are salient in investigations of transnational migration and how identity construction and social exchanges occur within these social fields.

As a recent Pacific example, Gershon (2012) has published a comparative ethnography on the Samoan diaspora of California, U.S.A. and Auckland, New Zealand. Gershon depicts the 'cultural expertise' that is both consciously performed and unconsciously enacted in these communities. She describes 'cultural expertise' as an ease in negotiating cultural protocols and expectations and discusses the choices Samoans are making between the 'cultural' and 'acultural' and how tensions become obvious in interactions with money. Gershon constructs the ethnography using material from documents, online content, and both historical and contemporary artifacts of Pacific cultures. Similarly, my research on Niuean digital transnationalism places emphasis on how digital media exchanges in daily life can be read as cultural texts to show their influences in the construction and contestation of Niuean identity.

Gershon uses documents such as grant applications by Samoan cultural groups to understand the ways in which the U.S.A. and New Zealand governments view 'culture.' In addition, she connects this data with her personal participation in the process of writing grant applications with the Samoan community group,

which included reviewing previous applications and undertaking content analysis to understand why a grant application may or may not have received funding. Gershon also investigates the tension between the capitalist framework in the U.S.A. and New Zealand and Samoan culture in which there is an expectation for ritual exchange and contributions to family offerings in ceremonial events. Funerals rituals involve offering fine mats to the grieving family to show honour and respect toward the deceased. The mats are artifacts that often circulate transnationally, and they can be examined and analysed as signifiers that illustrate the different 'rules' and agendas of exchange. Similarly, this research 'follows' the anxieties and agendas surrounding the 'preservation' of Niuean culture and identity—textural footholds which brings us to digital transnationalism. Like the Samoan mats, digital exchanges act as social currency within the Niuean transnational social field. These exchanges which are aimed at helping to maintain language and tradition include Facebook pages which have become a hub for cultural advocacy; while the sharing of photos from a 'hair cutting' or of a cultural dance competition has become both personal and nationalistic.

### **Transcending Through Communication**

Transnationalism would not be what it has become without the ability for people to communicate. Communication has always overcome distance which is a large hindrance to the maintenance of relationships and the relay of important information. Over the centuries there have been many technological interventions to reduce the limitations of time and distance. As such, transnationalism has been "facilitated, but not [necessarily] caused by improved

transportation, technology and telecommunications, globalisation has entailed the increasing extent, intensity, velocity and impact of global connectedness across a broad range of human domains... enhanced transnational connections between social groups represent a key manifestation of globalisation" (Vertovec, 2009: 2). Baym (2010) argues, "The fundamental purpose of communication technologies from their ancient inception has been to allow people to exchange messages without being physically present" (Pg. 2). Gongs, bells, smoke signals, the call of the conch shell, letters, telegrams, and telephone calls have now in many contexts been superseded by smart phones, text messaging, the Internet, and a plethora of platforms for interaction, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and multi-player gaming.

The concept of digital transnationalism introduced in this thesis essentially underscores the roles that digital media (and the technologies that support it) are playing in experiences of transnationalism. The increasing use of digital media has meant that research must include the investigation of smart phones and digital media platforms. Due to the dialogical nature of web 2.0, it is not only possible to think of ourselves as communicators using talk and text, nor as simply 'consumers' of media, but also as users, agents, enterprises, and entrepreneurs (Hartley, 2012). In fact, digital media has become so significant that Miller (2011) argues that the localisation, adaptation, and use of Facebook is so distinct that its use in the US, UK, or Australia will vary from that in Africa, China, and South America. It is therefore a valid focus for localised ethnographic research. In the next section I will give a brief outline of research on use of the Internet and digital media to highlight the compatibility of fusing the analytical



sensibilities of 'transnationalism' and those of 'the digital.' This will assist me to develop a new lens of engagement: digital transnationalism.

## **Transnationalism or Diaspora?**

Faist (1999) distinguishes diasporas as a distinct form of transnational community making. The concept of a diaspora and diasporic community can only be enabled by a transnational flow of people through migration (whether chosen or forced) from one country of origin to another, yet the group often retain and maintain their cultural distinctiveness (to varying levels) amidst the host society and culture, which often leaves them very separate from their adopted homes; as distinct from a migrant community who may be more open to adaptation and assimilation. However, Basch et al. (1994), Levitt & Schiller (2004), Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) and Mau (2010) write about the need to study and analyse traditional migration (including diaspora) studies under more of a social transnationalism lens to capture and investigate the rich nuance of these experiences.

According to Karim (2003), diasporas, first as migrant communities (re-)create 'home' in the new place they occupy; "they do it with their languages, customs, art forms, arrangement of objects and ideas... It is not a physical place but an existential location dependent continually on the resonance of cultural practices" (Karim, 2003: 10). The ability to exchange messages with individuals on the other side of the planet, and to have access to community information from 'home' changes the dynamics of diaspora, allowing for enhanced linkages. They

work together in the creation and re-creation of a sense of nationality and ethnicity; ultimately personal and communal (yet diasporic) identity.

The term Diaspora has historically been associated with the study of the dispersal of people, and their strong hold on to their religion, culture and identity amongst the differing lands they had settled. Levitt and Schiller (2004: 1010) refer to the theoretical move away from diaspora to transnational social fields from solely being the study of 'displaced peoples' such as the exile of the and the mass migration for asylum of the Jewish tribes, or the Africans taken as indentured slaves. Because of this theoretical shift, since the 1990s studies of diasporas have incorporated 'migration by choice' rather than un-chosen displacement, and have overlaid these people's stories with the 'receiving site' or 'host' country. However, while Cohen encourages the broadening of the theoretical scope of diasporism, Cohen suggests there still is criteria of which to qualify if a certain spread of people as diasporic, and allow a distinction between an instance of migration, and the development of a diaspora. One requirement is for the migrant to hold on to a level of cultural distinction and an acknowledgement of their ethnic origins and heritage from the host nation and culture to build diaspora.

William Safran outlines the qualifying features of 'diaspora' to be that they or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original 'centre'; that they believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate; Their ancestral home is idealized and is thought that, when conditions are favourable, either they or their descendants should return; They believe all members of their diaspora should be committed to the

maintenance or restoration of the original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; They continue in various ways to relate to that homeland and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are in an important way defined by the existence of such a relationship. Cohen also suggests that he would allow a show of time to 'prove' simple migration to actually be the emergence of diaspora (Safran, 1991). Although the Niuean communities in Auckland display some of the traits Cohen suggests, only time will tell if Niueans become a diaspora (as defined by Safran). It is due to these reasons I chose to align more with Levitt and Schiller's 'transnational social field'<sup>3</sup>.

## **Transnational Identities in the Pacific**

As alluded to earlier, in a seminal chapter, Hau'ofa (1993) argues that Pacific people have always been transnational in a sense that the transversion of the seas was very common. He argues that this mobility only became problematic when neocolonialist agendas began creating boundaries, which caused an unnatural confinement. The large kinship and reciprocity networks that spanned the Pacific Ocean were broken up into isolated pockets of sociality, making them small, confined, and impotent against larger land masses and populations. Hau'ofa challenges normative ideas of development in the region and the imaginings of the potential of the Pacific, instead advocating that the people of

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<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge the growing body of literature on 'digital diaspora'; migration, identity and digital media. Among others, see Bernal (2014), Halegoua and Aslinger (2016), Alinejad (2017). Though I have identified and drawn from these works, my fieldwork revealed less affinity with 'diaspora', but rather a 'transnational social field' negotiating 'being' versus 'belonging', and a nationalistic 'preservation' agenda, which is in-part being shaped and extended via digital media. I therefore chose to align my analysis with 'transnationalism' and 'long distance nationalism' literature.

the Pacific understand that “their universe [is] comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean, as far as they could traverse and exploit it... their world was anything but tiny... they viewed their world as a ‘sea of islands’, rather than ‘islands of the sea’” (Hau'ofa, 1993: 7). Hau'ofa questions the perception of smallness and remoteness, rather than expansive networks of economic and kinship ties. Hau'ofa highlights the contemporary migratory movements of the Pacific people as reflective of how it always was for the ‘ocean people’ who have “broken out of their confinement, are moving around and away from their homelands, not so much because their countries are poor, but because they had been unnaturally confined and severed from much of their traditional sources of wealth, and because it is in their blood to be mobile” (Hau'ofa, 1993: 11). He argues that the transnational migration patterns we are seeing today are in line with past patterns rather than representing a new development.

The edited volume entitled *Migration and Transnationalism: Pacific Perspectives* (Tupai Francis and Lee, 2009) similarly unites the fields of Pacific migration (and the diaspora of Pacific peoples within that) and transnational studies. This was novel at the time. Lee writes in the introduction of the book that “within the vast body of literature on global migration, the Pacific is well represented; however, within the field of transnational studies the Pacific is virtually absent” (Lee, 2009a: 1). The book provides case studies of transnational activities of contemporary Pacific populations, of migrant’s experiences within the diaspora and the connections of their country of origins, as well as “the multi-directional movement of people, money goods of many different kinds, artifacts, ideas and

symbols” (Lee, 2009a: 1), all being circulated among individuals and their families, as well as being part of larger groups and institutions.

Lee ‘s work on Tongan culture has contributed to discussions on transnationalism, migration, and diaspora of the Pacific. Her ethnographic approach in *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores* aims to understand these themes, highlighting the complexity of Tongan identity in migration and how it is challenged, contested, and created in the everyday lives of Tongans who no longer live (or who have never lived) in Tonga. These groups are ‘diasporic’ in the sense of being “multiple communities of a dispersed population” (Lee, 2003: 6); that is, Tongans who have migrated to places such as New Zealand, The United States of America, and Australia. These groups are also ‘transnational’ and ‘multi-national’ in the sense that they move beyond national boundaries. They inherently represent and identify with multiple nations—namely Tonga and their current places of residence.

Spoonley (2014) also engages with the discussion of transnationalism and the Pacific diaspora in New Zealand, and the significance of the place of origin as much as the place of residence, specifically Auckland. This working paper highlights that Auckland is highly multi-cultural. It addresses why there is a high concentration of Pacific and Polynesian people groups calling New Zealand home, and how this informs academic discussions of transnationalism: “One of the interesting dynamics of recent decades has been the evolution of identity in a New Zealand context for Pacific People, especially against the backdrop of ongoing links of various sorts with a ‘homeland’ ... linkages that provide the

essence of these transnational communities... with the Pacific in fundamentally new ways” (Spoonley, 2014: 1). However, in this article Spoonley is primarily focused on the transformative nature of the Pacific diaspora in New Zealand, and the impacts this has on the economic and societal experience. Spoonley describes the maturation of a disadvantaged migrant community that is now made up of New Zealand-born Pacific peoples “developing new cultural forms and identities... from a position of multiple loyalties and identities, located in a community that maintains strong transnational networks” (Spoonley, 2014: 17). The focus is on Auckland’s history of migration, how it has impacted on policy making since the 1950s, and how it has transformed relationships within the maturing migrant communities who still maintain transnational connections.

Lee and Gershon research two different groups of people who are diasporic Samoans and Tongans in the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. Gershon also published an article about ethnographies of the Pacific and diaspora studies (2010), focusing on the value of ‘family’ within the concept of ‘diaspora’ and reinforcing the notion that families (of transnational Pasifika) become nodes within networks of knowledge and resources. Similar to the way transnational social fields are constructed, diasporic connections are drawn around and traced through familial units and genealogical lines. However, transnational Pacific families are smaller, bounded networks within a larger network. Diaspora only emerge because of the culturally-specific ways these families circulate knowledge, resources, sociality, and cultural codes. Furthermore, “families and diasporas are intertwined, connected to such a degree that diasporas cannot exist across generations without families

sustaining them” (Gershon, 2010: 475). For example, Lee’s work demonstrates that the circulation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of ‘being Tongan’ are distributed and subsumed within one’s primary network and relationships– and for most people, this is first their family. This focus on the transnational spread of the family unit as a smaller network within a greater transnational social field is also a large aspect of my research into Niuean identity construction.

### **Digital Media and Identity**

From a media studies perspective, there is a paradox in media’s ability to facilitate a national consciousness and collective thought in the private and personal sphere, such as through the act of reading a newspaper. Anderson’s (1991) concept of ‘imagined community’ also refers to ‘ethnic media’ or media made and consumed by a particular ethnic group such as books, newspapers, online forums, websites, and social media, as well as film and television. These help to cultivate and re-create a sense of a distinct community. Similarly, exchanges via digital media and communication within transnational networks have a key part to play in ‘nation building’ as well as the sense of ‘being’ versus ‘belonging’ (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), rehearsing and reproducing cultural practice and community. Whether using traditional media such as newsprint, radio, television, and film, or newer forms of media such as the Internet and social media platforms, these notions of identity and nation-building are evident in my research of the transnational social field of Niueans in Niue and Auckland.

The concept of an ‘imagined community’, especially in transnational settings, is integral in understanding how digital media are shaping the negotiation and

construction(s) of Niuean identities and vice versa. After all, what were formerly referred to as 'social networking sites' are now more commonly known as 'social media' due to their nature of scalable sociality and their capacity for 'content' delivery (Miller et al., 2016). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram sometimes mirror and extend what occurs in non-mediated exchanges, but in other instances they produce new modes and meaning of exchange and dialogue, thereby transforming traditional practices of communication and information sharing. As such, in part, my research is informed by the recent work of Miller et al. (2016) and asks how Niuean transnational experiences may have been changed due to social media use. How has Niuean sociality, a transnational social field interested in the maintenance and revitalisation of their cultural identity, leveraged digital media, and perhaps even been shaped by it?

The Internet has become a sphere in which different channels and platforms play key roles in the flow of information, interactive discussion, and opinion making, thus cultivating environments that build a sense of community and prompting consideration of how one's sense of self fits into that community. Since their introduction, social networking sites (SNSs) such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become the three most popular social media platforms in the US by market share of visits (Kallas, 2013). The social impact of these digital media platforms is particularly important in the study of personal and collective identity construction. As such, a large part of research on the Internet and digital



media began as investigations of social networking sites as places in which users communicate with others and present online versions of themselves.

In an early study of Friendster (boyd, 2004), the social networking site was identified as a public articulation of one's sociality and connectedness, making more visible existing social networks, which may be as authentic or contrived as they choose (Marwick, 2005; Skog, 2005). Other scholarship has focused on the ways in which race and ethnicity (Gajjala, 2007; Lee, 2003; Fortunati et al., 2012; Gershon, 2012; Burrell, 2012), religion (Nyland and Near, 2007), gender (Hjorth and Kim, 2005; Panagakos and Horst, 2006; Mahler, 2001), and sexuality connect to, are affected by, and are enacted in digital media. These studies began to investigate questions about how identity is shaped within these sites, and as a consequence, how social media also impacted how one saw and viewed others (Walther et al., 2008; Ellison et al., 2007). Social media are seen as dialogical and allow individuals to create content by uploading and sharing personal information, photos, or videos for their 'audience': their friends and those who 'like' them. In these settings, individuals are both consumers and creators, as well as being commentators on media content. The adaptation and remediation of these new modes of exchange are impacting identity, concepts of community, and global thinking, and appear to be creating social change (Gershon, 2012; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2013). Furthermore, Miller et. al (2016) argue that the world changes social media as much as social media changes the world.

Without over-fetishizing the impact of digital media and technology, research on 'the digital' is insightful to the degree that it reveals the already-mediated and

framed nature of the non-digital world, without making the two realms mutually exclusive. Boellstorff (2008) draws from his research on “Second Life” to argue for research to go beyond a dichotomy of ‘online’ versus ‘offline,’ ‘real’ versus ‘virtual’. Instead, he argues, we should view these spaces as merely another arena for interaction and engagement. Neither space is privileged over the other, nor do they become one singular, completely seamless space. This approach recognises relational mediation and the sense of ‘co-presence’ (Ito et al., 2005; Krotz, 2010); that is, how digital media and its affordances bends space and time to create a sense of co-occupancy and allows people to feel as if they are present in the same space, though being fully aware they are apart. Furthermore, some researchers have argued that digital spaces are disingenuous and defrauding, and that they create a romanticised view of the human experience (Turkle, 2011; Spigel, 1992). However, others have argued that they are actually more ‘authentic’ (Turkle, 2005; Lindholm, 2008) than physical environments because people feel ‘freer’ to be themselves, less bound by societal pressure. Indeed, some of Boellstorff’s respondents articulate that they achieve a sense of self-actualization that would not have been achieved in the ‘real world.’

Another concept that explores the relationship between the digital world and the ‘real world’ is polymedia. Madianou and Miller (2012) describe polymedia as relationship mediation carried out through multiple platforms, such as Facebook, Skype, phone calls, and texts. Polymedia can also include non-digital forms of communication sent via traditional means, such as care packages, letters, and cards. Madianou and Miller argue that polymedia practices are a crucial part of migrant workers’ experiences, since the combining of different communication

technologies and social mediation tools enables and mediates long-distance relationships once limited by cost and the lack of communication platforms which are available today. The end goal of these communications could range from the micro-coordination of future face-to-face meetings or the discussion of larger business or family matters. Transnational connectivity has made spatial distances less problematic for communication. As a result, major changes can be seen in an increased appetite for these types of mediated experiences (Hartley, 2012), especially in transnational communication.

### **The Digital Performative Practice of ‘Home’**

As distinct from other presumably similar concepts such as digital ‘ethnic media’ (Anderson; 1991) or ‘polymedia’ (Madianou and Miller; 2012), digital transnationalism is essentially the performative practice of ‘home’ and ‘nationalism from a distance’ cultivated and transformed in and through digital media. This next section examines the framework of digital transnationalism—how digital media is employed in the work of expressing and shaping individual, national, and transnational identities. I do so by looking at the overlap between ‘transnationalism’ and ‘digital media practices’, two themes that merge to become the premise for digital transnationalism. This lens of examination interrogates transnational practices that are *initiated*, *mediated*, and *extended* by digital media, and which would not be the same without it. Digital transnationalism brings a new stance of analysis, which provides a framework to understand how digital media is supporting, extending, and transforming transnational practices such as those related to communication, coordination, cultural revitalization, and cultural reproduction. In Niue’s case, digital

transnationalism helps elucidate the motivations behind the performance of nationalistic practices, and provides the fuel for cultural reproduction initiatives that find a voice in the digital.

As mentioned earlier, transnationalism can be described as being a force from 'above' in the sense that it is shaped by large corporate and governmental influences. However, transnationalism is also experienced practically and on a personal level; concurrently, from 'below' and 'in between,' which is seen in the "growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having two homes in two countries... [and through] regular contact across national borders" (Portes et al., 1999: 217). Panagakos and Horst (2006) argue that transnationalism is also shaped by generation, settlement history, cultural values, class, access, as well as homeland and host country politics.

In the Tongan context, Helen Lee (2003, 2006, 2008, 2009) has developed a rich body of work on Tongan culture and contributes to the discussion on transnationalism, migration, and diaspora of the Pacific. Her ethnographic approach in *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores* (2003) aims to understand these themes. She highlights the complexity of Tongan identity in migration practices, and how they are challenged, contested, and created in the everyday lives of Tongans who no longer live in Tonga or who have never lived there. Like the Niueans in this study, there is a focus on a diasporic groups: Tongans who have migrated to places such as New Zealand, the U.S.A., and Australia. Lee delves into several aspects of Tongan culture and the challenges faced by Tongans living away from Tonga. Lee uses the content from the online forum

entitled Kava Bowl (KB), for much of her online ethnographic research on the Tongan diaspora. Lee examines the online posts and conversations, and these form a valuable component of Lee's research. The digital data gathered from KB is combined with participant observation with Tongan families, and used to contextualise and ground Lee's ethnography.

Similarly, Olwig (2007), in her book *Caribbean Journeys: Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks*, 'follows' the movement and relational ties of three family networks dispersed throughout the Caribbean, North America, and Great Britain. Olwig explores the maintenance of family networks across large distances and across several continents through a combination of mediated communications and remittances. Madianou and Miller (2012) trace the communicative practices of migrant workers in the U.K. and the parenting model in their homeland, the Philippines. In this study, relationships were mediated and managed from a distance via polymedia, the use of multiple platforms for relationship mediation. This is exemplified by the ways in which mothers send their love to their children through text, calls, emails, and care packages. As a further extension, the focus of my research is how digital media practices and communicative assemblages are facilitating transnational identity negotiation.

My respondents described Facebook as a way to keep up with what is going on in the lives of their friends and family, since digital media has the ability to mediate the co-construction of meanings of community and identity. Niueans are an example of a phenomenon whereby which attachments to land and place may be

more digital than real, where the intention to build 'Niue pride' is more about creating a 'movement' without moving, and where the digital is seen as a tool to co-create what it means to be Niuean. Such observations provide nuance to how we understand digital media as fitting into transnational lives. Online social network platforms are a convenient and inexpensive way of keeping in touch and cultivating a sense of close community despite large geographical distances.

Looking at the individual and kinship-network level, Levitt and Schiller demonstrates that social transnationalism involves large movements and flows, and smaller individual articulations of these influences. These may or may not be flowing in the direction, at the same speeds, or at the same levels. Levitt and Schiller highlight that in many modern cosmopolitan and multicultural societies these 'transnational social fields' overlap, intersect, and pivot around many political and social engagements.

Scholars such as Fechter (2007), Cohen (2008), Madianou and Miller (2012), Lee (2003), and Smith and Guarnizo (1998) suggest that, on a personal level, these transnational experiences of permanent migration and transnational economic trade activities experienced by expatriates and working holidaymakers are marked by nostalgia of 'home'. As mentioned earlier, according to Karim (2003), diasporas, first (re-)create 'home' in as migrant communities in the new place they occupy, and they do it with their languages, customs, art forms, arrangement of objects and ideas; cultural practice. The ability to exchange messages and to have access to community information from 'home' changes the dynamics of diaspora, allowing for enhanced linkages. They work together in the

creation and re-creation of a sense of nation and ethnicity and, ultimately, personal and communal (yet diasporic) identity. In Benitez's case, Salvadorans in Washington D.C. not only stay in touch with their family 'back home,' but also use new media to "engender new practices of collective identity representations in the experience of diaspora" (Benitez, 2006: 183). Salvadorans in the U.S.A. are not the only diasporic groups making extensive use of ICTs and online communities and platforms to explore notions of a collective identity.

Longings for 'home' are often expressed through the use of ICTs and social media to communicate with family and friends overseas. Platforms and websites vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and the sharing of still and moving images. Regardless of the mediation platform, digital transnationalism is the way Niueans approach digitally mediated communication. Examples in this thesis include communication with friends and family to coordinate the time and place of a cultural workshop, or a milestone event such as an ear-piercing or a wedding. Similarly, digital transnationalism also includes the publication of the photos taken of that cultural event on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, which other people actively like, share, and comment.

Digital transnationalism emphasises how digital media enables connectivity that creates a simultaneity of 'place' and 'space.' A synchronous communication space which would not be necessary without physical separation and geographic dislocation (Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Pries, 1999). People who practice transnational lives find a deep connection between the personal use and

consumption of digital media, and the maintenance of their connections with, and imaginations of, 'home.' As Appadurai states, "The transformation of everyday subjectivities through electronic mediation and the work of the imagination is not only a cultural fact, it is deeply connected to politics" (1996: 10). This electronic mediation connected to nationalistic imaginations highlights linkages between individual participants and their sense of community and group identity. The participation of Niueans in online forums and community media, and their affiliation with Niuean organisations, influences imaginations of 'family,' 'nation,' 'home,' and their socio-political obligations as a member of the diasporic migrant community in another land. Each digital media application shapes interactions based on the design and the affordances provided by the platform and the environments within which communication takes place. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or national identities.

## **Why Niueans?**

Niueans are transnational. Their lives often transcend the national borders of the small island state, and as my research focus indicates, they maintain significant connections between Niue and the diasporic communities now residing in Auckland, New Zealand. According to Bradatan et al. (2010), a transnational identity can only develop among those who not only master both languages (host and origin), but also come into contact with and have the social skills to establish connections with people and communities from both the host and origin country. Based on this definition, I argue that Niueans are transnational, even if they live only in Niue. There are two primary reasons for this. First, from a legal



perspective Niue is in free association with New Zealand, and is therefore technically both countries at once. Because of this, English is the second national language, and there are very few Niueans who are not fluent. Secondly, much of the television programming comes from New Zealand, many have family and friends who reside in New Zealand, and many spend at least three to four years in New Zealand for tertiary studies. Connection to both the host country and country of origin could be said to be established at birth.

For Niueans, one does not have to move to engage in transnational practices. According to Bradatan et al. (2010), because people who stay behind are connected to those who migrated, they are exposed to a constant flow of economic and social remittances (or ideas, practices, and identities that migrants import) on a regular basis. As a result, even individuals who have barely left their home villages adopt values and beliefs from afar and belong to organizations that operate transnationally. With so many social and political links to New Zealand, the two national identities are inter-dependent upon one another. This results in a transnationalism that flows both ways and occurs both off, on, and in-between the island. Furthermore, a transnational communication and engagement with digital media has resulted from this transnationalism.

Niue is a self-governing Pacific island nation with a population count fluctuating as low 1400 and as high as 1600 (Government of Niue, 2011). It is located 2480 kilometres off the coast of New Zealand. While Niue is self-governing, it is in free association with New Zealand, which means that New Zealand provides on-going maintenance and economic support as well as easy access to New Zealand,

where a significant number of Niueans now live. This relationship has ensured the development of Niue's basic infrastructure, as well as health and education levels that are comparable to those of wealthier countries. Similarly, this relationship with New Zealand means that Niueans are also New Zealand passport holders. This fluid state boundary has resulted in many Niueans emigrating to New Zealand,<sup>4</sup> resulting in those living on the island having close family and friends residing in Auckland. Furthermore, Niueans who reside in Niue regularly visit New Zealand for recreation, business, to visit friends and family, or to undertake tertiary studies. However, Niueans believe there is a downside to this transnationalism: they see it a threat to their traditional knowledge and cultural identity. To counter transnational forces, nationalistic initiatives and cultural workshops have become a prominent part of daily life. This is the case for both Niueans in Niue, and among the diasporic communities in Auckland.

## Nationalism

'Nationalism' is a political doctrine that holds that humanity can be separated into discrete units called the *nation* or the *state* (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996). Nations are understood to have a unique and distinct identity, culture, language, and/or religion. As such, nation-making and cultural reproduction are tied to notions of nationalism in the sense that they involve a concerted effort to perpetuate the nation's cultural and societal norms, from one generation to another, and so on. Cultural reproduction and nation-making activities can be

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<sup>4</sup> According to the 2013 NZ Census there were 23,883 Niueans residing in New Zealand

intentional initiatives aimed at sustaining and maintaining a homogeneous national identity and/or set of cultural ideals. These types of activities may include independence holidays, the propagation of folklore of national heroes, cultural festivals and celebrations, as well as a strategic media agenda or television programming that reinforces notions of nationalistic unity. However, cultural reproduction also includes informal day-to-day living that reinforces these cultural practices. These practices are then learned and 'passed down' to subsequent generations (Barnard and Spencer, 1996).

### **Nationalism from Afar**

Transnationalism is the extension of the geographic reach of these nation-making activities: the performance of 'nationalism' from a distance. In receiving nation-states (such as New Zealand), movements aimed at recuperating and reifying a mythical national identity are a way to resist the penetration of alien 'others.' States of origin (Niue, for Niueans), on the other hand, re-essentialise their national identity and extend it to their nationals abroad as a way to maintain their loyalty and the flow of resources "back home" (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998: 9). Schiller and Fouron (2001) describe a similar process in their depiction of Haitian 'long distance nationalism' and the search for 'home' among those who now live in the United States. Georges and his family, who live in New York, are an example of how nostalgic longings for 'home' manifest in the participation of nationalism among Haitians who are living as transmigrants "simultaneously in two countries, participating in personal and political events in both the United States and Haiti" (Schiller and Fouron, 2001: 3). Schiller and Fouron define a transmigrant as one who makes choices and decisions to live

their lives across borders, tied to their ancestral land by their thoughts and actions, whether or not they frequent 'home' again at all.

### **Niuean Digital Transnationalism**

Niueans are participating in nationalistic activities both on and offline, both on and off island. Over the years a debate amongst the Niuean transnational social field has been whether one can claim to be Niuean if they have never been to the island nor speak the language. In order to draw out the complexities of Niuean identity construction such as that, I asked my participants several questions regarding what it means to be Niuean. Though responses were varied and often competing, the prevailing sentiment was the potential loss of Niuean language and culture, and though 'times change' we should try and preserve and maintain it. Due to Niue's small population size, external global influences, and climate change, Niueans in Niue feel that the perpetuation of their language and culture is tenuous. For Niueans living in Auckland, this feeling is all the more compounded due to the fact that Niueans are one of the smaller communities that make up the already-small 'Pacific Islander' populous in New Zealand, often referred to as a 'minority within a minority'.

In Auckland particularly, these different tags and labels become important in the determination of what it means to be Niuean. For the respondents of this research, labels were continually shifting and morphing—they were both Niuean and New Zealander, or a New Zealand-born Niuean, or a Niuean who now lives in New Zealand; they are part of the Pacific Islands, and they are their own country within that 'Sea of Islands' (Hau'ofa, 1993). Respondents expressed their need to define their 'being' and/or 'belonging' to their Niuean-ness (and/or being or

belonging to the label of a 'Pacific Islander' or a 'New Zealander-Niuean') that were embraced at differing levels and used at different times, in different settings.

Digital media help to constitute and negotiate transnational identities. Digital media thus brings new ways of 'being' and 'belonging' to one's Niuean-ness. Although Niuean transnational identity construction is complex and multi-layered, this thesis draws out a particular feature which has been become more visible due to digital media: a call to nationalistic pride and cultural preservation. The geopolitical conditions of Niue and New Zealand, Niueans have a desire to maintain kinship ties and familial bonds, to establish 'visibility' amid the multi-cultural urban setting of Auckland, both out of a desire for their connection to Niue—their ancestral land—to 'stay alive'<sup>5</sup>. With the majority of the Niuean populace living off the island, claims of what it means to be Niuean have arisen out of a concern over the potential loss of Niuean culture and identity. Because of the movement of Niueans primarily to New Zealand, as well as the growing influence of their new (Western) homes on Niuean migrant communities, and the social change flowing back to Niue as a result, the idea of Niue's culture 'dying out' has been a growing concern for Niueans. Although this has been a concern for many years, new media platforms and transnational communications have recently allowed Niueans to engage in this negotiation in dynamic, iterative ways. I use qualitative accounts of digital transnationalist practices of Niueans in

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5 A common way my respondents described their nationalistic initiatives and programs, which were seen to prevent their culture and language from 'dying out' and disappearing. Their efforts were helping the Niuean culture and identity to remain 'alive' as a vibrant and visible part of their daily lives.

Niue and Niueans in Auckland to analyse the practices and consequences of Niuean digital transnationalism; that is, the phenomenon of transnationalism as facilitated, extended, and amplified in new ways that are only possible due to the affordances cultivated in digital media environments.

## Thesis Outline

My key research question is, 'how are digital media shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities?' Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram mirror and extend what may occur in non-mediated exchanges, but in other instances they produce new modes and meaning of exchange and dialogue, transforming traditional practices of communication and information sharing. This thesis engages with the theoretical building blocks of 'transnationalism,' 'transnational social fields,' and 'long distance nationalism' in the context of a growing engagement with digital media. I ask how Niuean sociality, a transnational social field interested in the maintenance and revitalisation of their cultural identity, has both leveraged and been shaped by engagement with digital media. How and why are different media used? I argue that Niueans, who navigate the transnational nature of their relationships between Niue and New Zealand in and through digital media, are an example of digital transnationalism. In this chapter (Chapter One) I introduced the research questions and theoretical starting points for this research. Chapter Two outlines the research design, locating 'the field' and the research sites, and giving a brief overview of my field experience. I articulate why the qualitative research methods of multi-sited ethnography, participant observation, in-depth interviews were chosen to

investigate Niuean identity and culture, and the role digital media play in the negotiations of these.

As it is equally important to investigate the setting and context of the content, and motivation of Niuean digital transnationalism, Chapters Three and Four provide an historical background of Niuean transnationalism. First, Chapter Three highlights the development of communication infrastructures on the island nation of Niue, and the implications of Niue being the first nation to offer free WiFi to all residents. It highlights the relationship Niueans have with ICTs and technology, which reveals how the ICT infrastructure enables and fosters their digital transnationalism. Second, Chapter Four discusses cultural revitalisation agendas as they occur in Niue and Auckland—a joint mission. This chapter delves into the desire Niueans have to maintain their language and culture from dying out. Much of this underlying rhetoric pervades Niueans' views of digital transnationalism, as I detail in subsequent chapters. Through understanding these histories and assemblages, I investigate the way that digital media has impacted contemporary negotiations of Niuean identities. These are individual and national identities that are transnationally spread and which find new means of engagement in a digital age.

Chapter Five provides context to the transnational constructions of Niuean identity and culture in Auckland, and the particular ways that Niueans in Auckland problematise their identities by using 'ethnic make-up' and in honouring their 'roots.' These processes of identity problematisation are further shaped by interactions with other ethnic groups in Auckland. This chapter

therefore investigates the transnational experiences of Niueans in Auckland juxtaposed with Niueans in Niue. Together with the subsequent chapters, Chapter Five constructs the argument that Niueans both in Niue and abroad choose to express the implications of their transnationality via digital media.

Chapters Six and Seven build upon the ways that Niueans are problematising their transnationalism by providing ethnographic examples of the concept of digital transnationalism. As a particular subset of the digital transnationalist activities, Chapter Six takes a close look at Polyfest, a high school age cultural festival, and how it has become a digital media event for Niueans. The chapter follows practices such as rehearsals and award ceremonies, which are documented and remediated through selfies, tweets, and YouTube clips. They represent a digital media event in Niuean digital transnationalism. Polyfest elicits analysis of how ‘nationalism from afar’ is expressed amid the diasporic community in Auckland is discussed and illustrated by extensive ‘news feeds’ that reflect ‘Niue pride’ imagery, further shaping the imagination of the Niuean identity.

Chapter Seven builds upon the examples of Polyfest to further the case for digital transnationalism. I present other examples including use of Facebook pages, international hashtags rallies, and educational YouTube videos, none of which would have taken place without the affordances of the digital media environments of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. These two chapters focus on the role of the Internet, social media, and transnational communications in shaping the way Niueans are constructing Niuean identity



and culture between Niueans in Niue and Niueans in New Zealand. I highlight the textural differences that infrastructure and access is making to Niuean digital transnationalism, which is particularly interesting due to the national commitments to ICTD and public WiFi in Niue (discussed in Chapter Three).

## Conclusion

As well as being one of the few ethnographic investigations on Niuean transnationalism and the impact of digital media, this thesis presents Niue as a case study for *digital transnationalism*. This thesis contributes to the growing research on digital media and transnationalism. It is ethnography of the negotiations of Niuean culture and identity in digital spaces, which have become a normalised practice of their transnational lives. These practices are visible in both personal and private communication, as well as in public posts regarding identity and culture. These transnational phenomena are incubated, fostered, and facilitated by digital media. As aforementioned, digital transnationalism encapsulates the way digital media interfaces with the politics and daily practice of transnationalism. Digital media platforms and their affordances perform an infrastructure, conduit, and materiality of the experience of transnational lives. Digital media have transformed the way Niueans are experiencing and expressing their transnationalism. As an outcome of my PhD research, I propose digital transnationalism as a new lens of analysis which acknowledges the increasingly overlapping themes of 'transnationalism' and 'the digital'.

## **Chapter 2:** *Research Design and Methodology*

When I first began my research it was evident that the histories of Niue, the South Pacific, and New Zealand were deeply interconnected. Furthermore, Niue could not be studied in isolation, nor was the production of Niuean culture and identity located on Niue island alone. Since Niuean culture and identity construction is enacted both on Niue island and amongst the diasporic population in Auckland. As a result, I approached my research with a multi-methods qualitative approach, using multi-sited ethnography, digital anthropology, and communicative ecologies mapping; all encased by a culturally sensitive reflexivity. In this chapter I outline the research methods used and the complexity of establishing research boundaries in my endeavour to define the 'field.' I then situate myself as the researcher in relation to my research. In addition, I give a summary of my entry points into my research sites, as well as a summary of my data and analysis.

### **An Ethnographic Approach**

A core marker of ethnography is 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) and how the events/exchanges/relationships may be thematically anchored in broader cycles, systems and theories. As Geertz asserts in *Interpretations of Culture*, ethnography is essentially thick description and a representation of a particular culture (or particular aspect of culture for a particular group or organisation), and the

methodology required to attain this. Ethnography, is not simply a matter of presenting 'facts', however it has more to do with the author's ability and responsibility in the construction of their representation.

The ability to achieve the 'thickness' of description that Geertz purports is typically collected through longer times of immersion, and participant observation. Ethnography is intentionally contextualises 'the researched' with great attention to the understanding of any subtext and innuendo apparent in exchanges of sociality. This is influenced in the way one reads the 'texts' of the 'field'. Geertz suggests that the responsibility of the ethnographer to distinguish between an involuntary twitch and a symbolically loaded and intentional wink. Ethnography aims to convey a fuller and richer picture, to bring to light the significance of an event or phenomenon. Which is why Fetterman says an ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the researcher must tell the 'story' of what was observed in their research and incorporate their interpretations and analysis.

According to Geertz, the researcher becomes able to be 'read' the texts of their field; So much so, as to be able to decipher a wink from a twitch (Geertz, 1973: 9). Crang and Cook (2007) emphasise that research on social relations is embedded in many layers of more social relations, developed and entwined between the researcher and the 'researched'. Similarly, Geertz stresses that when it is all boiled down, every piece of ethnography is essentially a constructed entity, loaded with subjectivity and interpretation, coloured by the ethos of the ethnographer, and then interpreted by the ethos of the reader.

Geertz (1973) and Crang and Cook (2007) stress responsibility on the part of the ethnographer for reflexivity, as ‘facts’ cannot be merely facts as they are first enacted through filters of ‘ethos and situ of the ‘subjects’, then experientially filtered by the ethos and sensibilities of the ethnographer; decisions are then made in the ‘moment’ as to what to ‘capture’, how this will be captured, what words are used, what aspects are focused upon; and that these are later represented in ‘polished’ form of thesis, article or book.

This understanding of ethnography has influenced my research in the fieldwork stages and continued to impact my approach to writing and analysis. It was not possible to achieve a ‘thick’ enough of a description of Niuean transnationalism without the tools of ethnography: extended immersion and participant observation. Geertz’s analogy of the practice of ‘learning how to read’ provides an approach to ethnographic study, where the ‘object’ of study becomes a text (positioned within a web of inter-dependencies), which you learn how to read and comprehend. However, like learning a new language, it can take time to gain fluency and a depth of understanding. Reflexivity highlights that as a second language, you will never know the language well enough, and you may never be able to grasp the nuanced meaning and weightiness of language like a native speaker.

### **Defining the Field and Following Niuean Transnationalism**

In the early research stages, I initially thought the ‘field’ would be geographically bounded by the island of Niue. However, this did not turn out to be the case. In August of 2013 I conducted pilot research in Niue that focused upon the

communicative ecologies of the island and how Niuean nationhood and futures were being negotiated. It was during this pilot study that I discovered the important relationship between Niueans in Niue and Niueans in Auckland that resulted in reformulating the research design to include fieldwork in Auckland. Similarly, it was evident that social media and communications technologies played a significant role in the development of personal and national identity and warranted inclusion in such a study of 'Niue.' I therefore modified my research design to carry out fieldwork in both Niue and New Zealand. I investigated how Niuean cultural reproduction was taking place in-between and online to create a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This thesis methodologically moves across the physical and imagined places of Niue, Auckland, and online interactivity, and the research field reflects a continuous movement between them.

With the rise of transnational migration and communications and media technologies, the single-sited research methodology was no longer felt to be adequate. The typical model of a 'field site' has thus been adapted to reflect the fact that the 'field' is often far more than a single, geographically-bounded research location. This shift in methodology is described by Marcus (1995) as multi-sited ethnography, and is a relevant approach to ethnographic research on transnationalism, migration, and diasporic identities, as well as transnational communication practices. Multi-sitedness as a methodological shift acknowledges the transnational activities and systems enabled by new technologies. The model has validated the ethnographer's instinct to go beyond the one 'local' location.

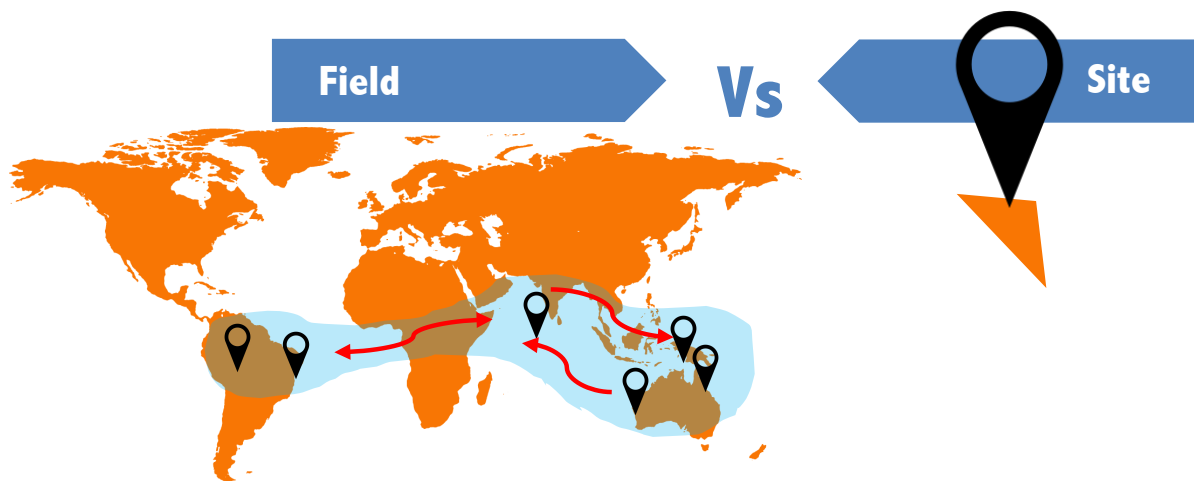


Figure 1 - Diagram illustrating 'Field Vs Site' (Created by author)

This multi-sited approach has enabled the exploration of the multi-directional movement of people, money, artifacts, ideas, and symbols that are circulated within networks of individuals, families, groups, and organisations. The essence of multi-sited ethnography is to 'follow' people, connections, associations, and relationships, rather than be bound by national borders. When this is done, the 'following' will more than likely transgress oceans, state lines, and arbitrary (yet socially constructed) boundaries such as between nation states.

Postill's anthropological account of the Internet and social media in Malaysia (2011) has informed the conceptual framework of this study and my approach to analysing my data. It recognizes that the Internet has become a major player in the media landscape. Postill's work stems from his research question, 'How does the Internet affect the running (i.e. governance) of multiethnic areas?' The research was undertaken in Subang Jaya, Malaysia and, more pointedly, what

Postill calls his 'field of residential affairs' and its Internet dimensions. He addresses the need to theorise his 'field', and writes:

This term [residential affairs] allows us to capture within a single analytical net both state and non-state agents whilst eschewing existing notions which either come with tacit normative assumptions that are best avoided... to address this study's central question, namely to what extent the Internet has altered the relations between Subang-Jaya's local authorities and its residents. (2011: 6)

The research boundaries were constrained by political activities taking place in Subang-Jaya, which also involve and occur on the Internet. Postill asserts that one must get to know a setting "both online and offline – those who live, work and play there" (p. 11), especially with the added layer of complexity as Internet and mobile technologies continue to converge. Because of these technological advances, the interfaces between the physical and digital, or the online-offline distinction, become more seamless and embedded in people's lives. These tensions add nuance to this ethnography and its theoretical underpinnings.

The Internet, mobile phones, and social media platforms comprise what Postill describes as 'personal media'—the personalised configuration of media practices in both publishing and consuming 'content.' Postill shows how Malaysia's political and social activists use personal media such as email, blogging, digital cameras, and websites dedicated to reducing crime in the community to leverage power and to rally and a greater level of engagement from the Subang-Jayan and foster a deeper sense of community. In the case of Niuean sociality, people

connect (as much as they desire) both on- and off-line, face-to-face or digitally, for whichever means they desire. How one chooses to interact with the media and technology scape around them is also heavily influenced by how much our culture and environment enable us to do so.

In this thesis I use the term 'field' to refer to the scope of the overall research project, and 'site' to distinguish the physical locations that are included in 'following' Niuean transnationalism and identity construction. My key research question asks, '*How are digital media shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities?*' using Niue as a case study of digital transnationalism. The presence of a large diasporic population in New Zealand, primarily concentrated in Auckland, brought my research to the 'sites' of Niue, Auckland, and online interactivity. I explore how Niueans navigate the transnational nature of their relationships between Niue and New Zealand as a case study of digital transnationalism. I ask: how has Niuean sociality, a transnational social field interested in the maintenance and revitalisation of their cultural identity used and been influenced by digital media? How and why are different media or platforms used?

My research questions reflect the problematic nature of the 'boundary-making' of the 'field' as I focus on the transnational nature of Niuean identity construction. Movement across the physical and imagined places of Niuean identity construction cannot be bound to a single location. As such, the research field is a continuous movement between Niue, Auckland, and online interactions. My research is a multi-sited ethnography bound by the transnational social field



(Levitt and Schiller, 2004) of Niueans, whether in Niue or the diasporic communities in Auckland, and in the online interactivity in-between. However, I found that even after I had reformulated my field site onto the identified 'sites' of Niue and Auckland themselves, the idea of the 'field' remained problematic. As a result, a key strategy in my research was follow Niuean transnationality and using snowball sampling. The 'field' became a patchwork of several different lives running simultaneously, and often intersecting.

Olwig, Addo, Madianou and Miller, and Burrell were helpful studies which informed my research methodologies and helped frame my research approach and lens of analysis. For example, Olwig (2007) in *Caribbean Journeys* 'follows' the movement and relational ties of three family networks dispersed throughout the Caribbean, North America and Great Britain. In 'following' the journeys of the people and families, Olwig's research goes beyond even the typical model in migration studies. Similarly, Addo (2013) 'follows' the textile objects and the social relationships surrounding these objects to construct the research field that was comprised of two 'sites' - a village in Tonga and Tongan diaspora in Auckland. Madianou and Miller (2012) traced the communicative practices of migrant workers in the U.K. when parenting their children back in their homeland, the Philippines. Similarly, Burrell (2012) discussed the challenge in the methodology of "patching together a field site to get at the phenomenon of Internet Café use and the circumstances of urban youth" (Pg. 32). In my own thesis it has been helpful to use the word 'field' to refer to the totality and scope of my research lens, and I use the term 'site' to distinguish which physical

location I am referring to in the research; whilst 'following' Niuean digital transnationalism and identity construction.

## **The Methodology of 'The Digital'**

To develop the methodological lens of digital transnationalism, I adapt the methodological stance of Horst and Miller (2013) in their introduction to *Digital Anthropology*. They argue that 'the digital' should be viewed amid a broader, holistic picture of human habitus and material culture, positing that "social order is itself premised on a material order. It is impossible to become human other than through socialising within a material world of cultural artifacts that include the order, agency and relationships between things themselves and not just their relationship to persons" (Horst and Miller, 2013: 25). This approach also recognises the materiality of infrastructure, content, and context, arguing that 'the digital' is more than just an ephemeral space, or platform; rather, it has been adopted, domesticated, and normalised, and has become a constitutive part of our lives. Horst and Miller also argue the importance of both the physical and the more ephemeral aspects of 'the digital,' particularly given that they become a normal part of everyday life, so much so that digital media needs to be understood within existing networks and communities, lifecycles, and life experiences (Horst and Miller, 2013: 4). What follows are examples of other research on digital media.

The practicalities of ethnographic research that includes digital dimensions of the field-online amidst the field-offline meant that I faced a juggling act between the world on the screen and the world beyond and behind the screen. 'Beyond

the screen' describes the way research participants look down at the world in their smartphones, and then easily look up and interact with the world around them, their gaze shifting from their screen, going beyond their screen, and then moving back down again. There is a growing trend to use smartphone cameras to capture an event or object of interest (such as the self) and as an extension of their offline experiences that are integrated into their online spaces via Instagram or Facebook, thus being online and offline at once. Similar instances of this phenomenon are found in the work of other scholars, such as Gershon (2010), Ito et al. (2010) and Cumiskey and Hjorth (2013).

Social media practices are viewed as existing within a suite of wider social and technological relationship that research participants engage with (Postill and Pink, 2012; Horst and Miller, 2013). They are also a part of my ethnographic practice. However, Facebook was the primary social media platform used for this research project. Although my interlocutors used other platforms, Facebook was the 'go-to' site for interaction and exploration, as disclosed during in-depth interviews. On a secondary level, I also asked the interview participants how they viewed Facebook, and how they viewed technology in general and the impact on their way of life and culture. Another interview focus was the overall perception a participant had of their own culture, how they would define what it meant to be Niuean, and how they saw this translated into online spaces.

I was invited to join or 'like' several group pages by a few of the research participants, and they gave me suggestions about other pages to visit. These pages were public places that I would regularly check to gain an understanding

of what was being posted and to establish if there were any patterns. I was interested in posts connected with the negotiation or contestation of Niue culture and identity, and my interlocutors' definitions of what that meant. In addition, the 'public face' of Niue on the official tourism and government agency pages were accessed to supplement the data collected from offline investigations of Niue identity. The Facebook pages have a forum similar to the KB online forum discussed earlier and are therefore relevant to this research.

### **Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and the Cultural Expert**

In terms of situating myself in the research, I am not of Niuean heritage, nor had I heard much about Niue before I started the background research for my PhD candidature. My research focus and question began with a call to be part of a broader research project, an Australian Research Council linkage project "Mobilising Media for Sustainable Outcomes in the Pacific Region," in partnership with ABC International Development, with the head researchers of this project becoming my PhD supervisors. This was a pursuit I became passionate about as I was already intrigued by the way smartphones, Facebook and new media was changing the communication landscape/ecology around the world, and how the adaptation and remediation of new media were impacting concepts of globalisation, sustainable development, agency and identity - creating social change. However, I had never heard of Niue.

In my own reflexivity as an 'outsider' to the transnational social field who wished to attain authenticity in representation, it was important to me to be culturally sensitive, and conscious of my role and impact on the research. I therefore chose

the longer immersion time of an ethnographic approach (Atkinson, 2007; Crang and Cook, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) for my research design. An ethnographic approach was most suitable since spending more time in the field allows for the development of trust, respect, and the practice of reciprocity, which are strong values of the Niueans, and of Pacific peoples in general (Vaiotele, 2006). Similarly, the value of ethnography is in the robustness and richness of data which is co-created in the participant observation settings and in-depth interviews. It was also important for me to continually be reflexive and culturally sensitive throughout my research, I employed the cultural sensitivities of reciprocity and respect in ethnographic research, which Vaiotele (2006) describes as an integral stance in research methodology of the Pacific.

### **Reflexivity, Reciprocity, Respect & the Pacific**

When analysing research praxis in the Pacific context, Vaiotele (2006) highlights the cultural significance and impact Pacific indigenous values have on the way Pacific peoples see their worlds, and how this should impact research of these worlds. As much as the socially prescribed reciprocity of material goods and monetary gifts is a large part of the fabric of many Pacific cultures, a reciprocity of respect and honour is also highly regarded. *Vahā* is the Niuean notion of space/season or time, not dissimilar to the Samoan and Tongan concepts of *Vā* (Williams, 2009). *Vā* (Samoan/Tongan) or *Vahālotu* (Niuean) refers to the intrinsic understanding of the relationship between people, including boundaries, expectations and reciprocity. As a researcher, being aware of these social dynamics were crucial to gain access into Niueans' lives, communities, homes and organisations. Although I was only able to spend four months in Auckland

and four months in Niue, I believe it was a reasonable amount of time to build rapport and a sense of reciprocity of respect, knowledge, time, and shared experiences.

Furthermore, the following two examples of research approaches which embody this concept of reciprocity and respect were those which influenced my research methodology and design. Gershon (2012) incorporates the sense of value, reciprocity of respect in highlighting the self-awareness and expertise of the research participant in their own life experience. Gershon argues that migrant Samoans are very self aware, and will readily reflect on the challenges they face in both living within the social structures of their host country, and negotiating the encultured demands of their heritage. Like Gershon, Lee (2003) also talks about the ‘expertise’ of those she researches and how her participants have a “self-conscious evaluation of the Tongan way” (p. 9). Lee combines interviews and informal conversations with members of the Tongan migrant community in Melbourne, with material posted on KB. She also carried out follow-up e-mail interviews to “give voice” to the experiences of Tongan migrants and their children (p. 10). These examples modelled my position as researcher to the researched: a reciprocity of reflexivity—the essentiality of the reflexivity of the researcher but also the valuable reflexivity of the research participants.

The concept of the ‘cultural expertise’ of the research participant is deeply imbedded into the methodology for this study, is a foundation of the research design and my approach to research participants. It is an approach that not only effectively positions the researcher to the research in a Pacific context, it is highly

compatible with my own personal values. When cultural sensitivities of reciprocity and respect are embedded into an ethnographic research approach every interaction becomes part of the process of building rapport and reciprocated respect; co-inhabiting experiences, and co-creating knowledge. It is also a lens through which the researcher views the researched as one who is the expert to his or her own life, with something highly valuable to contribute.

### **Reciprocity in Practical Ways**

As my research budget did not allow for large monetary reimbursement for participation, I made sure this was clear to any potential research participant. However, as many saw their participation in my research as an extension of their desire to “keep Niuean culture alive”, they were happy to contribute with no remuneration. In fact, they saw the prospect of Niue’s culture and tradition documented and celebrated to be reward enough. I did my best to also offer my gratitude in other ways though. As I would meet research participants in a café setting, I often offered to pay for any food or drink we consumed during our time together. I also offered a small box of chocolates as a token of appreciation.

Similarly, much of my participant observation activities involved ‘tagging along’ to meetings, events, and workshops that my interlocutors were attending. I also served as I observed. These were sites for rich data collection and observation, and in return I offered to ‘give back’ by helping in practical ways. For example, in Auckland I was privileged to have been part of the planning and hosting of an empowerment workshop for Niuean Youth. This involved attending several preparation meetings, but also me volunteering to be the official photographer

for the day. On the island I volunteered at the Museum and did small administrative tasks with Tāoga Niue.

Furthermore, as another way for myself as the researcher to maintain reciprocity, this thesis is also offered to the Niuean transnational social field as a piece of co-constructed knowledge and history; contribution to the maintenance of Niuean culture and identity.

## **Data Collection & Analysis**

After defining my field and being conscious of my approach, implementing strategies of reflexivity and reciprocity regarding my impact as a researcher, I collected my research material and data through a multi-methods qualitative approach. This research provides ethnographic examples that highlight theoretical discussions about how and where Niuean identity is being constructed, and what this looks like. I therefore focused on obtaining deeper insight through participant observation, and in-depth interviews.

Compared to other ethnographic studies which may undertake twelve to twenty-four months of fieldwork, my research was conducted in a relatively short amount of time. As my timeframe was constrained by university program requirements, finances, and personal responsibilities I spent in each site—four months in each location, Niue and Auckland. Although I believe eight months total was sufficient time to gather and co-create relevant data, I would have preferred a longer period of research. As the length of time in a field site is important to gain ‘access’ and ‘trust’, which is more compatible with the cultural



inclination of respect and reciprocity, this limitation of time may have stunted the observation and experience of seasonal shifts in Niue; for example, a special annual celebration that the participants found very important to their construction of cultural identity. However, in-depth interviews have the flexibility to touch on several topics as the conversation develops, so this limitation was somewhat overcome. Similarly, developing enduring relationships with participants (despite the distance) enabled follow-up questions via email.



Figure 2 - Diagram Illustrating research design and approach (Created by Author)

My main methods were participant observation and in-depth interviews. Both of these methods however required cultural contextualisation, learning the lived histories of my research participants. I obtained participants' lived histories in in-depth interviews, and through ongoing discussion. Audio recordings were taken of the interview sessions and transcribed. The in-depth interviews included questions relating to participants' experiences of transnationalism, and my analysis compared their responses with my observations of ICTs and social

media use by my participants. Participant observation interactions were recorded as field notes and journal reflections. Online interactions were similarly recorded as fieldnotes, and websites were bookmarked for future visits and further analysis.

## **Participant Observation**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, much of the rich ethnographic data was obtained in participant observation. This often involved me ‘tagging along’ to meetings, events, and workshops that my interlocutors were attending. For example, in Auckland I was able to observe and participate in the planning and hosting of an empowerment workshop for Niuean Youth. This involved attending several preparation meetings, but also volunteering to be the official photographer for the day. My participation allowed me to observe the different workshops as an ‘accepted outsider,’ and engage in several conversations about my research with the new people I was meeting through the workshop. In Niue I contributed an extra pair of hands to help set up the venue for the National Show Day that was hosted by Tāoga Niue, the government body that oversees the national cultural heritage preservation in Niue. After setting up I was also able to enjoy the proceedings as a support staff member and again be an ‘accepted outsider’ who would not normally have been free to sit under the shaded tent with the government dignitaries. In this setting I was able to listen to speeches and watch performances up close, and ask my hosts questions.

## **Interviews and Recruitment**

In addition to hundreds of participant observation interactions, I conducted formal interviews with 34 Niuean-New Zealanders in Auckland, and 19 Niueans in Niue. These research relationships were developed as time progressed, often involving many follow-up questions and discussion. These participants were approached in the participant observation encounters as well as through referrals using the snowball sampling technique. I supplemented data co-created in those interactions with data from statistical research in Niue conducted a few years prior by Foghammar (2012) as well as Census data on ICT use. In in-depth interviews I asked further questions about personal communication and social media practice, as well as ones relating to identity, culture, and transnationalism.

## **Integrating The Digital**

Digital transnationalism both online and offline is an integral part of how Niueans mediate their lives and experience relationships across national borders. Research relationships with key organisers and contacts involved in Niue events were critical to opening doors to experiences and interactions, and gave me first-hand access to observe national identity 'production' in both Auckland and Alofi. These events were advertised via the Internet and Facebook, and their 'essence' was captured in photographs that were uploaded and shared, although they cannot fully represent any event. Key interests of this research therefore include the ways that ICTs and social media are integrated into a life (seamlessly or not), and how social media can be seen as an extension of self, identity, and imaginations of self.

In addition to staying 'caught up' on Facebook, I also set up a Google 'alert' for any articles and news items on Niue and checked to see if there was any commentary or 'sharing' of these stories. I would also check for items that Google may have 'missed,' but which circulated on Facebook, and this added another layer of knowledge. In offline interactions I also attended the local radio and television broadcasts, which often circulated the same stories alongside international news items.

## Conclusion

By employing ethnographic research techniques, the main aim of my fieldwork was to gain a strong understanding of the ebbs and flows of everyday life in Niue's communities, both in the physical and ephemeral, online and offline, and in Niue and Auckland. In order to achieve this, I participated in day-to-day life and events alongside Niuean people.

I argue that understanding Niuean identity and culture cannot be achieved by focusing only on Niue island itself, and it cannot be separated from the co-constructions in communication via the Internet. Thus a multi-sited approach was necessary as 'Niue' and Niuean identity is not only being expressed on the island of Niue itself, but also within the larger Niuean community in Auckland, as well as online. This reality brings my work to a similar place methodologically as Marcus and Hannerz's 'multi-sited ethnography.' These approaches provided insight into how and where Niuean identities are constructed.

My 'field' is both on Niue island itself and in Auckland among the Niuean migrant communities, as well as incorporating communicative interactions on the Internet and through social media. Content analysis of posts on Facebook and other social networking sites makes Facebook a natural extension of my physical field 'site,' facilitating a multi-sited, multi-dimensional study of Niuean identity construction.

The multi-sited ethnographic approach was most suitable to research a transnational social field such as Niue. Ethnographic research calls for a longer time of immersion in the field out of reflexivity and a desire for authentic representation. This approach allowed for the development of trust, respect, and the practice of reciprocity, which are according to Vaioeti (2006), strong values of the Niueans, and of Pacific peoples in general. Cultural sensitivities of reciprocity and respect were embedded into an ethnographic research approach. It is also the lens through which I, the researcher, viewed the researched, as one who is the expert to his or her own life, with something highly valuable to contribute. As a result, every interaction became part of the process of building rapport and practicing reciprocity of respect; co-inhabiting experiences, and co-creating knowledge. This research methodology has cultivated a richness of data which was co-created in participant observation settings, in-depth interviews and analysis of digital media practices.

## **Chapter 3:** *Niue; Enabled for Digital Transnationalism*

*"I think a lot has changed in Niue - especially technology. I think we're pretty up to date with technology and stuff... like sometimes when we go to New Zealand and our cousins, they're surprised how up to date Niue is with our things... 'Cause you go to New Zealand, and not all kids have laptops over there... but over here a lot of kids have their own laptops".*

- Sione (27, resident of Niue)

### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces one of the two research sites of this project, the island of Niue, giving contextual background for the kinds of digital transnationalism that emerge later in the thesis. I begin by discussing the history, infrastructure, and demographics of the island, and the ways in which Niue has developed socioeconomically over the years, often in relation to New Zealand. A key aspect of my research was how the history of ICTD (Information Communication and Technology Development) in Niue has contributed to the digital transnationalism evident during my fieldwork in 2013-15. In this chapter I highlight how the investment in digital technologies by the Niue government laid the foundation for digital transnationalism. To do so I provide a background to key investments in ICTs in Niue which has created the communicative

environment enabling digital transnationalism today. In addition, this chapter embeds the investigation of how Niuean culture and identity is maintained and negotiated in digital spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, and other websites. I argue that these examples of digital transnationalism were enabled by the development history of Niue, which has created the contemporary communicative ecologies (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 2004) and assemblages (Hearn et al., 2009) that cultivate capacity and digital literacy.

## **Nuku-Tu-Taha**

Several legends speak of Niue's genesis. These stories sketch out an island birthed by the stomping of the feet of two demi-gods, Huanaki and Fāo. As depicted by Pulekula (1903), these demi-gods ran (well, swam) away from their responsibilities in ancient Tonga. The legends go on to explain that Huanaki and Fāo were shunned by their community for not helping out in the preparations for a village ceremonial feast and, as a result, Huanaki and Fāo felt ashamed, embarrassed, and resentful, so they swam as far away from the village as they could. Other versions include three other gods who left with them. They swam until they came to a reef, just above the surface of the ocean. The two climbed up onto the reef and stomped their feet. Their stomping caused the reef to rise, causing the water to drain away and dry land appeared. They proceeded to stomp their feet again and up sprung grass, trees, and plants. This act created the island we know today as Niue. The legend tells how they turned from their lazy ways as they worked the new land to make it 'home'. Fāo became the ancestor of the people in the southern part of Niue. Huanaki became the ancestor of the people in the north.

The old name for Niue is Nuku-tu-taha, '*the island that stands by itself*.' This description is appropriate for Niue as it is distinct from the other Polynesian island groups such as Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands, which are clusters of islands, whereas Niue is a single island. Niue shares some linguistic and cultural similarities with Tonga, Samoa, and the 'Cooks'. However, the Niuean language is different from Tongan and Samoan, and therefore they are considered a separate people-group altogether. Due to Niue's coastal terrain that is almost completely insulated by high cliff faces and sharp limestone rock formations, it was rare and infrequent to have contact with outsiders. The first recorded contact with Europeans was with Captain James Cook in 1774. He came across Niue on his second voyage, where after circumnavigating and mapping what is now called New Zealand, he headed further afield. Upon discovering Niue, he and his crew made several attempts to land on the island but were met with resistance by its inhabitants. Despite no harm coming to Cook or his men, these encounters led to Cook naming the new land 'Savage Island.' Cook also references passing 'Savage Island' again on his third voyage in 1777, but did not attempt to visit the island (Cook, 1842: 86). It was many more years before Niue had any other noted contact with Europeans. In 1830, Peniamina, one of Niue's national heroes, was taken from Niue and it is said that he converted to Christianity and undertook bible school training in Samoa with the London Missionary Society. Once completed, he returned to Niue to share the gospel, and a few years later Samoan missionaries came to help establish Christianity in the so-called 'Savage Island.'



It is this relationship with the London Missionary Society throughout the 1840s and 1850s that led Niue to voluntarily submit under British protectorate. This association was formalised in 1900, and Niue was then annexed to New Zealand in 1901. Initially, Britain administrated Australia, the Torres Strait Islands, Papua New Guinea, some of the South Pacific Islands, and most of New Zealand as one colony, called 'New South Wales.' However, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, British rule was undergoing several changes to the Commonwealth dominions and colonies. These changes in administration meant Australia and New Zealand became independent from each other, and eventually Niue was assigned under New Zealand's domain. The work of Loeb (1926) and Kunitau and Hekau (1982) suggest that all of these influences have played major roles in shaping the ideologies of contemporary *faka Niue* (the Niue way).

## Niue Today – Infrastructure and Demographics

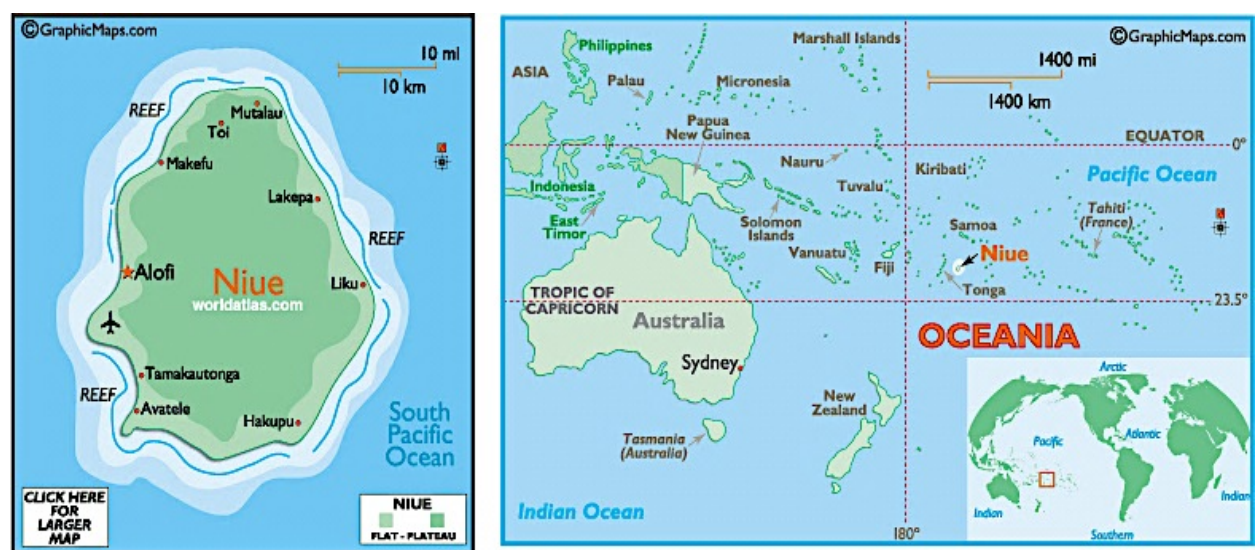


Figure 3 - Maps from [www.mappery.com](http://www.mappery.com)

Niueans often refer to Niue as '*The Rock of Polynesia*' because Niue is a single raised coral island of around 260 square kilometres in size. Niue has fourteen villages, which dot the circumference of the island with the majority of farming lands and conservation areas located near the centre of the island. Niue's central business district, education hub, and house of parliament are situated in the main village of Alofi. In the past when the population was much higher, there were schools in nearly every village, but they were all amalgamated as the population declined to critically low levels, and the maintenance of multiple schools across the villages could not be justified. Due to this centralisation in Alofi, most people travel there nearly every day for work or studies, regardless of which village they are from.

## **Population**

New Zealand and Niue's special relationship is founded on close historical ties, unique constitutional arrangements and a common currency. Because of Niue's free association with New Zealand, Niueans also hold New Zealand passports. This fluid state boundary has meant that many Niueans have emigrated, and now live in New Zealand, and it is not uncommon for Niueans who reside in Niue to regularly visit New Zealand to visit friends and family. As mentioned earlier, this has resulted in a relatively small population residing in Niue.

The population of Niue gradually dropped due to out-migration to New Zealand, from a peak of 5,200 in 1966 (Walsh and Trlin, 1973) to a population hovering between 1,400 to 1,600 people – not all of whom are native Niueans (Government of Niue, 2011). In 2015 due to a combination of natural population

increases and continuing out-migration from Niue, it is estimated that there are now around 25,000 who identify themselves as ethnically Niuean, residing in New Zealand, nearly 20 times the number of residents of Niue. Although this is large compared to the population on the island, it is but a small percentage of the total population of New Zealand. According to the census conducted by the Government of Niue in 2011, the count on the night of the census was 1,611 – 802 males and 809 females, however 151 of those were visitors, leaving the usual residential population of 1,460 although 147 were counted as temporarily away at the time of count, making the de jure population 1,607.

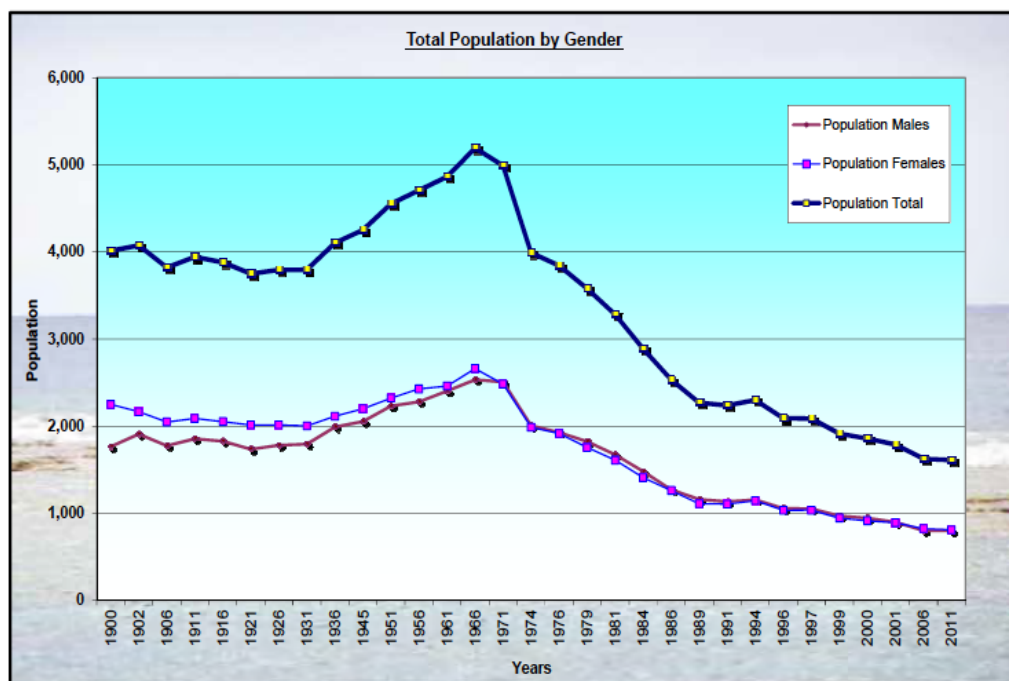


Figure 4 - Table of Niue population from 1990- 2011, from 2011 Niue Census

Figure 4 shows the decline in Niue’s population over time. Even for such a small population, it is important to note that 20% of the population are ex-pats, approximately one-third of the population are children and/or school-aged, and

approximately 12% are over 65 and over and most likely retired from the formal workforce (see Figure 6).

Ethnicity	2011					
	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,460</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>50.5</b>
<b>Niuean</b>	<b>971</b>	<b>66.5</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>52.0</b>
<b>Part Niuean</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>48.2</b>
<b>Non Niuean</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>47.3</b>

Figure 5 - Table of breakdown of Ethnic diversity in Niue, from 2011 Niue Census

Age group	Male	Female	Total
0 - 4	71	67	138
5 - 9	56	75	131
10 - 14	56	61	117
15 - 19	65	45	110
20 - 24	57	38	95
25 - 29	36	55	91
30 - 34	44	43	87
35 - 39	44	40	84
40 - 44	47	37	84
45 - 49	41	47	88
50 - 54	57	45	102
55 - 59	43	50	93
60 - 64	25	34	59
65 - 69	27	30	57
70+	53	71	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>1,460</b>

Figure 6 - Table of breakdown of Age and Gender in Niue, from 2011 Niue Census

Villages	Total Population		
	Male	Female	Total
Alofi South	203	221	424
Alofi North	108	107	215
Makefu	36	33	69
Tuapa	53	44	97
Namukulu	8	6	14
Hikutavake	22	18	40
Toi	8	15	23
Mutalau	44	50	94
Lakepa	27	24	51
Liku	33	37	70
Hakupu	76	53	129
Vaiea	41	48	89
Avatele	68	71	139
Tamakautoga	75	82	157
<b>Total</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>1,611</b>

Figure 7 - Table of breakdown of population by village, from 2011 Niue Census

Furthermore, Figure 7 shows that the population per village is not evenly distributed, with some villages only housing a handful of families whereas others have more than 400 people.

## Employment and Economy

The largest employer is the Niue Government employing a large percent of the working population as civil servants, public works contractors, teachers, police, and healthcare workers, and so on. According to the 2006 Niue Census, almost 50% of the workforce were in the public service sector. Unfortunately, the 2011 census data employment did not categorise by 'type of occupation' and the

distinction between private and public sector was omitted. However, it can be presumed the numbers would be similar. To validate this assumption, I manually calculated the type of occupations listed based on my knowledge of what would be classified as 'government jobs' with a result of 52%. Generally, it can be seen that the private sector is comprised of retail, tourism (besides the department of Tourism office), and customer service businesses. The commercial precinct in Alofi has a Kiwibank branch, Niue Post office, Niue Telecom offices, Rocket Systems (Internet Café and IT support hub), several food and consumables stores, a hand-full of restaurants, a local artist's gallery, and a supermarket further down the road. These employ customer service staff in grocery stores, souvenir shops, the petrol station, as well as in the restaurants and tourist accommodation. There are several car rental businesses and mechanics on the island, and many tour guide operators and accommodation suppliers. Teachers and administration support staff would be classified under the public sector.

Niue's remote location and low population make economic activity on the island difficult and small-scale. However, tourism is one industry that is thriving, and over the last two years Niue and New Zealand have focused investment in this area to help bolster the economy through increased visitors and tourism expenditure. Moreover, Niue has found a niche targeting the 'eco-tourism' and 'soft-adventure' markets. The pristine waters, bush lands, and the rocky coastal terrain make it a great place to explore for the tourist who is not looking for a place to just 'drop and flop' (although they have that option too). Guided tours are available, but tourists are also encouraged to explore the island themselves. New signage, toilets, and change rooms have been erected at tourist spots such

as lookouts, swimming holes, and along walking trails. When I arrived in Niue, after Customs and Immigration, I was handed a tourist pamphlet and a guide to local businesses and events. This was given to all the newcomers with the aim to equip visitors with the knowledge of where we could dine, buy groceries, hire a car, and the points of interest one could explore without a formal tour—an important means for local businesses promote themselves.

The flight from Melbourne to Niue connects via Auckland, and each leg is approximately three hours. Air New Zealand is the only airline that flies to Niue, and until recently there was only one flight per week (Tacchi, Horst, Papoutsaki, Thomas & Eggins, 2013). In March 2013 a second flight was introduced every fortnight, and in 2014 this increased to two flights every week during the peak tourist season. These additional flights have dramatically increased the traffic flow of tourists and have also made it more convenient for travel to and from the island for Niueans. The second flight is suspended between October and February during the off-peak season. During my period of research in 2013-2015, the Niue government was encouraging increased private investment into the tourism industry by building new units and renovating existing buildings to provide more accommodation for tourists, especially in the 'down' season. Niueans living both on and off the island were offered low interest loans by the Niue Development Bank, and Niue Tourism offered advertising support and subsidies. These development decisions by the Niue and N.Z. governments all suggest they are focusing on the potential prosperity in building a strong tourism industry.

## Transport and Utilities in Niue

Niue has one pre-school, one primary school, one high school, and a small University of the South Pacific (USP) campus. Students travel from all around Niue to the southwestern part of the island close to the Alofi village centre. Since the damage caused by Cyclone Heta in 2004, much of the re-build of the schools, hospital, and the government buildings has been undertaken further inland on higher ground to help guard against total destruction from another tsunami-like event. There is no public transport system in Niue; however, there are several private contractors who serve as 'school buses' for both primary and high school students. The primary school students start school at eight in the morning and finish at two in the afternoon, and high school from nine to three. This staggered start time allows the buses to collect and drop the primary school students and return to collect and drop the high school students. Otherwise, the majority of citizens have a private mode of transportation, primarily cars. Since most formal work places are concentrated in Alofi, with larger resort accommodation along the southeastern coast, a car or motorbike for personal transportation is critical for those who live in the outer villages. Mutalau and Liku, the furthest villages, are a 25-30 minute drive from Alofi. Tourists are encouraged to hire a car or bicycle to explore all that Niue has to offer.

Niue primarily uses diesel to generate electricity. The island's power station is about a two-minute drive from the capital, just down the road from the high school, museum, and USP campus. Most homes that were built in the last 5 years are fitted with solar hot water systems and subsidised by the Niue Government. There are also several banks of solar panels that were donated by the European



Union and a coalition of NGOs. Solar panels are projected to contribute 8-10% of the island's electricity requirements. Niue has a series of water tanks throughout the island that are in place in the event of power outages, since running water relies on electricity (this was made possible by several funding initiatives from the EU and SPC).

### **Media and ICT Infrastructure in Niue**

Niue has most of the technological infrastructures of today's developed world including potable running water in the home and flushing toilets with the associated plumbing (septic tanks). Electricity is available in all the villages, and landline phones are installed in most homes and establishments. A 2G mobile network was only recently erected in the latter half of 2012, yet there has been free WiFi since 2013. 2013 statistics indicate that, because Niueans have access to free and reliable Internet, Niue had the highest level of Internet penetration per head of population in the Pacific. 92.4% of Niueans are Internet users, compared to 6.4% in Papua New Guinea, 11.1% in Vanuatu, 15.2% in Samoa, 36.8% in Fiji, 37.7% in Tonga, and 61% in the Cook Islands (Internet-World-Stats, 2013). These statistics are significant and indicate Niue's desire to be at the fore of communication technology in the region.

During fieldwork however, which include a short pilot study in mid-2013 and longer fieldwork from July to October 2014, the Internet was generally comparable to 'dial up' speeds. In my conversations with Niueans regarding their experiences with ICTs, they often noted the difference between the Internet

speeds in Niue and those in more built-up cities such as Auckland, Sydney, or Suva. The most common difference cited was being unable to watch and load YouTube clips easily, and the long time it took to download and view web pages, especially if they contained large graphics or dynamic elements such as embedded videos or animated advertisements. Nevertheless, the Internet performed administrative and communicative functions for both work and personal use, and Niueans negotiate the different communication platforms on which to achieve these.

#### Telephones:

Villages	Total # of Households	Automatic Telephone	Cellular Telephone	Mobile & Smart Telephone	Fax Machines
Alofi South	128	93	0	99	16
Alofi North	56	47	0	32	3
Makefu	22	16	0	14	2
Tuapa	30	22	0	10	2
Namukulu	6	3	2	0	1
Hikutavake	15	0	12	8	2
Toi	9	0	6	1	1
Mutalau	31	0	24	16	2
Lakepa	21	0	17	6	4
Liku	22	0	24	6	1
Hakupu	39	0	28	23	4
Vaiea	15	0	11	7	0
Avatele	43	26	5	14	1
Tamakautoga	40	29	0	13	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>39</b>

Figure 8 - Table of telephone ownership in the home, from 2011 Niue Census

In the 2011 census the total number of telephones in private households amounted to 614, 236 automatic landline telephones, 249 mobile/smartphones,

and 129 fixed cellular telephones. Although the 2011 census shows numbers indicating that mobile and cellular phones were present, it was not until 2012 when a true mobile network was erected. Within that figure only three households are without a telephone, and the rest in business or government establishments.

#### Radio, Television, and Print:

Villages	Total # of Households	Radio	Television set	Sky TV
Alofi South	128	107	161	14
Alofi North	56	54	72	5
Makefu	22	13	22	2
Tuapa	30	23	30	3
Namukulu	6	4	5	0
Hikutavake	15	11	15	1
Toi	9	10	12	1
Mutalau	31	24	36	6
Lakepa	21	5	27	2
Liku	22	26	28	1
Hakupu	39	26	47	5
Vaiea	15	9	20	1
Avatele	43	22	54	3
Tamakautoga	40	37	44	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>54</b>

**Figure 9 - Table of radios and television ownership by village, from 2011 Niue Census**

There was also a count of 371 radios, 573 televisions, and 54 connections to Sky TV. With only 477 households, it shows there are some homes with more than one television. Niue has local TV and radio broadcasting, and television is a mix of local, New Zealand, and Australian content. Local content is mainly a news program which air every second day, and there are also broadcasts of national and village celebrations and events. I found it surreal to attend an event one day

and see myself on television the next. Niue's broadcasting network, BCN, recently introduced long 'music breaks,' which are a montage of photos and footage from older news stories played to a soundtrack of Niuean music. They are played during off-peak viewing times, such as late at night and early morning. The majority of the Australian content consisted of children's programming, and news and current affairs programs in the evening. Niue Radio broadcasts local and international news and community announcements. Music segments are a combination of traditional 'island' and western music. The song line-up ranged from old rock and RnB classics to current pop songs. The 'Niue Star' is the only local newsprint publication and is published fortnightly. A local business man explained: "...we usually know the news before its been published... so to be honest, I don't really read it...". Several young people concurred with this sentiment; however, one young woman admitted that she still looked at the advertisements and skimmed through to look at the pictures.

#### Computers and the Internet:

The Internet in Niue is obtained via satellite and distributed through public WiFi hot spots, and/or ADSL connections direct to the home or establishment. The lower cost of PCs and laptops, combined with an increase in the disposable income of Niuean households, has seen a rise in the acquisition of personal computers, tablets, and smartphone devices.

There are three Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Niue, although Niue's free WiFi is the most used. A second service is the recently-established Telecom Niue

ADSL. The third service is provided by the small University of the South Pacific (USP) campus. It has a dedicated satellite connection separate from the public WiFi network and facilitates an e-learning environment for students. As a goodwill alliance, USP also provides services to the Niue High School (NHS) library and IT lab, as well as to several computers used for the school's administrative needs.

The school grounds is an interesting intersection of all three ISPs, resulting in multiple layers of Internet connectivity, the USP connection, the Telecom Niue ADSL, and public WiFi. All are available at different locations in the school, often overlapping and providing varying speeds and accessibility. The USP connection is not wireless and is only available on the USP and NHS computers. Although faster than the public WiFi, it blocks most social networking sites as well as sites that contain pornography or gambling. Similarly, the government agency network blocks Facebook and other social networking sites for most of the day, except for the lunch hour. The Telecom Niue ADSL connection at NHS is for staff use only and is accessible via WiFi in the staff common room; however, download limits are quickly consumed, slowing the connection to an almost grinding halt. Because of these restraints, engagement in personal communication and entertainment is primarily carried out through the public WiFi connection. While this service is not intentionally restrictive of channel choice, users find they are inhibited by slow speeds and limited bandwidth.

Villages	Total # of Households	Desktop Computer	Laptop Computer	Computer Printer
Alofi South	128	64	102	61
Alofi North	56	15	50	17
Makefu	22	5	13	2
Tuapa	30	7	17	9
Namukulu	6	2	3	1
Hikutavake	15	3	8	4
Toi	9	2	6	2
Mutalau	31	5	33	10
Lakepa	21	7	11	9
Liku	22	2	15	4
Hakupu	39	12	24	9
Vaiea	15	8	6	4
Avatele	43	12	27	10
Tamakautoga	40	11	22	11
Total	477	155	337	153

Figure 10 - Table of computer ownership in the home, from 2011 Niue Census

The 2011 census results showed a high rate of ICT ownership, with a total of 592 computers (155 desktops and 337 laptops) and 153 computer printers. Even though the total number of computers is greater than the number of households, the distribution indicated that not all households have computers, meaning again multiple devices in some households. However, not owning a computer did not mean no access or exposure to ICTs, because computers are readily available in schools and places of work, and the sharing of computers between families is widespread (Government of Niue, 2011).

Figures 9 and 10 below show the distribution of those who have access to an internet connection, and internet use by age and sex. The data shows that 206 of the 477 homes had a strong village WiFi connection or individual connection in

the home. However, the census findings also showed a total of 829 persons (4 years and above) used the internet at the time of census. The data also showed that there were more female (51%) than male (49%) users, and the big users of internet were from the age groups 10-4, 15-9, and 20-24.

Village Number	Total # of Households	Dial Up		Wi-fi	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Alofi South	128	0	128	84	44
Alofi North	56	0	56	25	31
Makefu	22	0	22	2	20
Tuapa	30	0	30	7	23
Namukulu	6	0	6	1	5
Hikutavake	15	0	15	0	15
Toi	9	0	9	0	9
Mutalau	31	0	31	16	15
Lakepa	21	0	21	9	12
Liku	22	0	22	10	12
Hakupu	39	0	39	17	22
Vaiea	15	0	15	11	4
Avatele	43	0	43	16	27
Tamakautoga	40	0	40	8	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>271</b>

Figure 11 - Table of Internet connectivity in the home, from 2011 Niue Census

Age Groups	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
	829	100	404	49	425	51
4 - 9	40	5	12	1	28	4
10 - 14	97	12	46	6	51	6
15 - 19	103	12	58	7	45	5
20 - 24	86	10	49	6	37	4
25 - 29	77	9	25	3	52	6
30 - 34	67	8	31	4	36	4
35 - 39	71	9	35	4	36	5
40 - 44	68	8	38	5	30	3
45 - 49	67	8	30	3	37	5
50 - 54	59	7	33	4	26	3
55 - 59	40	5	19	2	21	3
60 - 64	24	3	11	1	13	2
65 - 69	15	2	8	1	7	1
70+	15	2	9	1	6	1

Figure 12 - Table of Internet use by age and sex, from 2011 Niue Census

Total	829	%
Home	567	68%
Work	405	49%
Another Home	214	26%
School/University	187	23%
Other Locations	155	19%
Any place via Phone	17	2%
Any place via other Access	58	7%
Community Internet Access	159	19%
Commercial Internet Access	108	13%

Figure 13 - Table of the place Internet use, from 2011 Niue Census

As mentioned earlier, a lack of a computer or internet connection in the home is not necessarily prohibitive to Internet access. Public WiFi is accessible via village hotspots in all of Niue's thirteen villages, while some homes have personally



dedicated connections. As Figure 13 shows, school and workplaces were the second and third highest-ranking places for internet access. Furthermore, the census specifically asked respondents to list 15 purposes for which they use the internet.

Purpose	Total	%
Email	711	86%
Education or Learning	462	56%
Instant Messaging	442	53%
Information about Goods and Services	421	51%
Information on Health	337	41%
Online Newspaper	311	38%
Information from Government Organisations	286	34%
Playing or Downloading Games	256	31%
Interaction with General Government Organisation	239	29%
Internet Banking	224	27%
Purchasing/Ordering Goods	218	26%
Downloading Movies Images	180	22%
Downloading Software	163	20%
Telephone over Internet	105	13%
Others	257	31%
<b>Total Users</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>63%</b>

Figure 14 - Table of the purpose of Internet use, from 2011 Niue Census

As seen in Figure 14, according to the findings of the census, the main or top uses of internet in Niue are email (711), education and learning (462), using the Internet for instant messaging (442), and accessing information about goods and services (421).

## ***Niue Ke Monuina* – Situating Development in Niue**

Niue's national challenges revolve around the threat of climate change, limited agricultural capability due to small land size, a low population and comparatively large and growing diaspora, geographic isolation, and the nation's reliance on aid. These all contribute to notions of identity and place, as well as shaping Niueans' vision for the future, defined as "*Niue ke Monuina* – A Prosperous Niue." As part of their sustainable development goals, the national objective is to build a "sustainable future that meets our economic and social needs while preserving environmental integrity, social stability, and the Niue culture" (Government of Niue, 2009-2013). While Niue is not identified as a nation experiencing absolute poverty, the country is vulnerable due to their low economic scale, low and declining population, and threat of environmental disasters. Niue's government expenditures regularly exceed revenues, and the shortfall is covered by grants from the New Zealand government. New Zealand's development support for Niue in 2013/14 was NZ\$19.6 million, and it is Niue's primary development partner, contributing significant financial and technical support to the country's development. As a result, Niue's national development plans reflect the need to stimulate economic growth through tourism, agriculture, and building supporting ICT infrastructures and resources for education, to equip the future leaders of the country (Government of Niue, 2009-2013).

Niue's sustainable economic development and eventual independence is a continuous priority for the governments of both Niue and New Zealand, and the New Zealand Aid Programme is actively working to support this. In 2006 the Governments of New Zealand, Australia, and Niue established the Niue

International Trust Fund. New Zealand is the main contributor to the fund. The purpose of the fund is to lessen Niue's dependence on external assistance in meeting the demands of its core budget. Until then, contributions will be made by New Zealand, Australia, and other parties from time to time to continue to build the fund. Development in the South Pacific region is an area of focus for Australia as it provides half of all global official development assistance to the Pacific island countries. Australia gave over \$1.16 billion in 2011-12 to these countries collectively, including \$1.4 million dollars to Niue in 2014<sup>6</sup>.

Niue suffers from a declining population, which impacts the economy and impedes economic growth. Over 20,000 Niueans reside in New Zealand. They are drawn by educational and employment opportunities and family ties. This leaves approximately 1,500 on the island. A key objective of both the Niuean and New Zealand governments is therefore a commitment to sustainable population growth and maintaining a vital community on the island. Although Niueans do not experience material poverty, a 'poverty of opportunity', and 'poverty of choice' (term abstracted by the work of Sen [1981]) is emergent and impacts Niueans' capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004). As a result, the Niue National Sustainable Development Plan (NNSDP) reflects a commitment to the MDGs as well as recognizing the need to specifically stimulate economic growth through tourism and agriculture, and through building and supporting infrastructures and resources for education to equip the future leaders of the country (Government of Niue, 2009-2013).

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6 As on the DFAT Australia website: [https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/niue/niue\\_brief.html](https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/niue/niue_brief.html), accessed January, 2015

Development strategies, whether ICTD based or not, whether local or externally funded initiatives, are all generally working with the notion of an imagined 'brighter' future. For Niue it is a future that is prosperous, while preserving environmental and cultural stability. Channeling funding into education and ICTs is part of Niue's way of aligning with and creating the prosperous Niue being envisioned. Niue has all the technological and societal constructs of the 'first', or 'west', or 'developed' world, yet still has problems with having financial limitations and the dependence of funding of Aid money, similar to less economically developed, global south or 'third' world countries. Due to the low population, the small land size, and geographic isolation, Niue's economic growth is impeded on several fronts.

A failed Reef Fisheries venture on Niue is an example of several of these connected factors. The large and deep fishing waters and the potential of fish exports sparked the interest of a joint private and public investment. However, this venture failed a few years later because a regular and reliable form of transportation for export could not be established. Niue's shallow wharf is not deep enough for large ships to dock. This was another contributing factor, which meant only small fishing trawlers could operate. An onshore processing plant was built in Alofi, but when the doors closed for the last time in 2010, this was the final sign of the business's failure. This is an example of the unique balance of factors that impact Niue's future success. It is very evident by looking at the country's financials, that without the support of the New Zealand government the island would not be able to economically sustain itself, and presumably, the population would drop to zero.

## A Development Goal – A Nation on the Net

### Public WiFi

One of the ways in which Niue seeks to meet some of their development goals is through ICTs. As also discussed in Anayo and Horst (2016), over the past two decades there have been several ICT projects initiated by the Niuean government, as well as by both external and domestic NGOs. In the Niue National Development Plans (NNDP) of 2003-2008 and the 2009-2013, Niue committed itself to “Provide efficient postal, telecommunication, meteorological and broadcasting services and explore and encourage Information Communication Technology (ICT) development.” This quote from the NNDP highlights how the Niue government views ICTs as a valuable agent in development agendas overall. Niue’s development agenda guides many funding allocation decisions as well as different NGO agendas.

The government’s commitment to ICT development in Niue is reflected in the history of the Internet and computers on the island. Since 1997, Niueans have had access to the Internet, and since 1999 it has been maintained by the IUSN Foundation (formerly IUSN - Internet Users Society Niue) and operated by Internet Niue ([www.internetniue.nu](http://www.internetniue.nu)). As the desire for greater accessibility grew in the early 2000s, investigations were made into whether WiFi technology could provide an innovative and cheaper solution to increasing access. To overcome a lack of government funding, and in order to generate an income, the retail of the domain annex, ‘.nu’ enabled investment into hardware and expertise to erect a WiFi network (Natarajan, 2001; St. Clair, 2003). This enabled

investment into the hardware and 'know-how' for Niue to become the first 'WiFi Nation' (Natarajan, 2001; St. Clair, 2003). The domain suffix was particularly successful because, in the Swedish and Danish languages, 'nu' is translated as 'now,' making it a desirable addition to branding strategies for companies in these countries. There are websites for Swedish organisations such as studera.nu, tv.nu, folkhogskola.nu and gblod.nu.<sup>7</sup>

Portions of the profits from the maintenance of '.nu' domains were allocated to the IUSN foundation to purchase and install the initial technological hardware and the expansion of the network, as well as covering ongoing satellite subscription costs. This business model has allowed the establishment and expansion of the WiFi network today. When first established, there was only one hotspot in Alofi; however, today there is a WiFi connection in twelve of the thirteen villages.

Over time, the move from a community Internet café model to the individualisation of ICT and Internet use, enabled by public WiFi, has resulted in growing data demand and consumption. The lower costs for PCs and laptops and an increase in the disposable income of Niueans have seen a rise in the acquisition of personal computers, tablets, and smartphone devices. As a result, the demands on download and bandwidth capacities in Niue outweigh the ability to supply satisfactory Internet speeds.

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<sup>7</sup> According to domaintyper.com, based on global traffic data, there are 476 sites in the top 1 million visited sites with the domain suffix .nu – <https://domaintyper.com/top-websites/most-popular-websites-with-nu-domain> – Accessed December of 2015.

In March 2010, Niue's bandwidth capacity was increased to 4 megabits per second (Mbps) inbound and around 500 kilobits per second (Kbps) outbound—the maximum load at the time. Further upgrades added another 2Mbps from the installation of a second satellite in 2011 (Anayo and Horst, 2016). This six-fold increase in bandwidth was still comparatively small and costly. In 2010, Internet Niue spent NZ \$214,738 for satellite subscription fees, compared to NZ \$115,046 in 2009 (Internet-Niue, 2010). From 2009 to 2010, data consumption almost doubled, which reflected Niueans' desire for increased access to family and friends in other countries via the Internet, and their desire to download music and movies, as well as opportunities to participate in and influence public issues online. In 2013, the Niue government also lay fibre optic cabling around the island to strengthen government communications and digital security. Once completed, Niue Telecom started retailing ADSL connections as well.

Further upgrades in April of 2016 saw the installation of another satellite, which increased bandwidth from 8/2Mbps to 16/6Mbps. The Internet service was rebranded as 'Kaniue – Native Broadband.' Due to the desire for greater Internet capacities and the inadequate funds coming from IUSN, Kaniue decided to start charging \$50 per month for 10gigs to help growth and development. At the time, Niue Telecom's ADSL offered 20Mbps, with Kaniue offering 22Mbps.

### **One Laptop Per Child**

Along side development of the Internet infrastructures, the Niue government also a focused digital literacy and ICT ownership. In 2008, Niue participated in the OLPC Oceania project. The following quote reveals the motivations for the

initiative across the Oceanic region, and the rationale that was by extension, inherited by Niue when OLPC was taken up. This is an example of the 'hope' that was placed on ICTs to achieve nationalistic and economic outcomes.

Today's six year olds graduate in 2020...

"Why would a child in a developing country need a laptop?

Would we ask if they needed an education? "

– Nicholas Negroponte.

In 1996, Internet access was restricted and novel in global terms, today it is wireless and approaching potential ubiquity. So much has changed in technology in the last 12 years, how can we know what will 2020 look like? In education, how do we prepare children for a world we cannot predict? What should education be when information is just a few clicks away?

Here are some things we do know about the school leavers of 2020:

They will be competing for jobs on a global market

They will be working with as yet undeveloped computational devices, many in still to be imagined industries, in digitally connected communities;

They will need 21st century skills to succeed: information literacy; critical thinking; innovation & creativity; open-ended problem solving; technological fluency...

(OLPC-Oceania and SPC, 2008: 2)

The founding members of OLPC were faculty members from the MIT Media Lab, Delaware. OLPC was pioneered by Seymour Papert and Alan Kay, and in part, on the principles in Nicholas Negroponte's book *Being Digital* (1995). OLPC also



embraced corporate members to design, manufacture, and distribute laptops that are sufficiently inexpensive to provide every child in the world access to knowledge and modern forms of education. OLPC's mission is to empower the world's poorest children through education [and deliver this through ICT]. The OLPC mission statement explains: "With access to this type of tool, children are engaged in their own education, and learn, share, and create together. They become connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future" (OLPC website [www.onelaptop.org](http://www.onelaptop.org)). OLPC also believes that the key to unlocking the knowledge is access to the technologies and tools, which facilitate learning, further unlocking their potential. The official OLPC website advises that as of 2011 there were over 2.4 million of these laptops delivered all over the world, to some of the poorest communities.

Below is another quote from the OLPC Oceania brief which highlights the incentive for OLPC from an education rather than technology perspective: The concept of creating useful, inexpensive, and sturdy computers for school children in the developing world was initially introduced by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab in late 2005, the brainchild of Media Lab Director Nicholas Negroponte. His vision is to extend access to basic education by getting a laptop in the hands of every child on the planet, starting with those most in need. This daring concept called for a new kind of machine and a new generation of software aimed specifically at children aged 6 to 12 years in the world's poorest countries: children on the wrong side of the digital divide, who have no or limited access to education, who live in communities of extreme poverty, often in the most remote, rural locations.

As Mr. Negroponte has often said, One Laptop per Child is an education project, not a computer or technology project. OLPC is about better learning opportunities for children, about unlocking their creative and intellectual capacity; and about improved educational outcomes for communities and developing nations. (OLPC-Oceania and SPC, 2008: 3)

The low financial cost made OLPC attractive for Niue, however the inability of the OLPC machines to interface with existing technology on the island made it difficult for the adoption and long-term use in the Niue education system, and eventually became obsolete. One Laptop Per Child in Niue was acquired, with an intent to lessen the 'divide' through addressing digital literacy and access, and are similar motivations of many other C4D and ITCD projects which are taken up in Niue.

In conversation with some key people in the Department of Education of Niue about OLPC, there was a mixed response as to whether they felt the OLPC campaign was successful or not. They cited incompatibilities with existing commercial technology, poor planning and as a result, a shallow adoption of the laptops into the school curriculum. Back in 2008, the low financial cost and the promise of a new tool for education made OLPC attractive for the Niue government to participate in. But it seems the promise of the laptops as an educational tool was not fully realised in Niue. However, the decision to even take on the OLPC scheme in Niue was driven by the faith that the Niue children could only benefit from having the laptops. Despite this hope, the inability of the

OLPC machines to interface with the existing technology and operating systems, as well as the high costs for the laptops to be repaired and serviced made it difficult for their long-term adoption and use. For example, Sana a woman in her mid twenties who grew up and still resides in Niue, revealed that she already had a PC at home that her family shared and had access to the computers at school when the OLPC initiative commenced in 2008. Although the OLPC machines were not seamlessly integrated into the school curriculum, Sana was able to access public WiFi and she essentially thought of it as her 'Facebook laptop.' She then described the way she and her friends experimented with a new level of personal agency provided by this individualised access to technology.

The desire for Niueans to be competitive on the international stage and to ensure they would 'keep up' with the rest of the world and not be disadvantaged by inexperience with technology and as a result, not have access to certain knowledge and knowledge processes was a motivating factor for Niue to participate in the OLPC Oceania initiative. The incompatibilities of the OLPC technology with existing structures and classroom curriculum resulted in awkward attempts to insert it into existing classroom routines and lessons. Despite the motivation being improving ICT access and education, Niue did not fit OLPC's driving objectives to begin with, so it is not surprising that the overall OLPC program was not continued in Niue. Firstly, the roll-out in Niue actually handed out laptops to children who had complete access to free-high quality education, and already had access, albeit limited access to technology such as computers and the Internet. The laptops were also given to students outside of the target age group of 6-12 years old, so when students in their late teens

received the laptop, the educational games were not age appropriate. The impracticality of the laptop not running on the commercial operating systems such as Microsoft Windows was another point that was brought up by teachers, especially not being compatibility to the other existing computers on the island.

## **Limitations of Infrastructure in Niue**

Although Niue is much smaller than Samoa, Tonga, and other Pacific nations, it has been at the forefront of the digital revolution in the South Pacific for many years. This has been evident in the numerous investments in information communication technology (ICT) infrastructure for the nation. In particular, the focus on ICTs resulted in Niue being one of the first countries to offer free Wi-Fi to their residents in 2003. This was quite cutting edge considering that Wi-Fi was only commercially released the year before. As a result, as mentioned earlier, the small island state has the highest level of Internet penetration in the Pacific region. However, this statistic does not capture the tension that has arisen due to the growing demand for, and consumption of, the Public Wi-Fi. In effect, although Niueans have the Internet, the internet is slow.

When the infrastructure for public Wi-Fi was built, few households owned their own PCs or laptops. Also, most popular social media sites, such Facebook and Instagram didn't exist, nor did smartphones. The increase in the demand for data can be attributed to an increase in Niueans' disposable incomes and the greater appetite for, and lower costs of, personal ICT devices. Coupled with greater availability of social and digital media, these changes have instigated seen a rise

in the acquisition of PCs, tablets, and smartphone devices to access them. As a result, demands on download and bandwidth capacities in Niue have increasingly outweighed the ability to supply satisfactory Internet speeds.

Many of my research participants noted that some days the network was so slow that they didn't bother going on Facebook because connecting, downloading, and uploading was time-consuming and frustrating. The high number of internet users, along with the emergence of new services, content, platforms, and apps, started to present challenges to Niue's provisioning of public Wi-Fi, especially in the last five years. Despite several upgrades over the years to accommodate growth, the high costs of Niue's satellite connection meant that the Wi-Fi speed was a constant source of frustration. Friction remains between the vision for the future and the present experience, confounding the perception of the Internet as fast-paced and providing 24/7 access to the rest of the world. That simply does not resonate with Niueans' experience of the Internet. Despite these limitations, Niueans would still endeavor to connect to the rest of the world using the Internet. The communicative ecologies of the island have influenced the participation of Niueans in Niue in their engagement in digital transnationalism.

"I don't have a phone at the moment... Until then, you can just Facebook me" advised Beni, who was coordinating a potential game of touch footy. He was still working out the details. As well as team sports he was interested in the recently released iPhone operating system upgrade, which was almost impossible to update in Niue. The WiFi was too slow to download the upgrade, so he asked his brother to take his phone with him to New Zealand, where it took only a matter

of minutes to complete. His desire to upgrade to iOS 8 also meant a two-week waiting period until his brother came back. Beni rationalised his decision with the fact that he had a laptop he could use to go on the Internet and also everyone knew where to find him if they needed him. He reasoned that they could send a Facebook message or email, which was how most people communicated before the mobile phone was introduced to Niue only a couple of years before. Despite this, Beni still had to adjust to not having a phone. He liked to upload photos of ‘#paradise’ and ‘#island life,’ which usually made his friends and family in Wellington jealous, especially in winter. Many of these images shared aspects of his lifestyle that urban dwellers were not likely to experience, such as Beni and his father planting taro, the latest slew of fish he caught using the traditional Niuean Vaka (one man canoe), and the beautiful sunset he witnessed while out on the water that evening. Beni and his friends also enjoyed some healthy competition on who had caught the biggest fish, and often photographed or filmed their latest ‘catch’ as proof. He lamented that he had to be careful when bringing his phone out onto the water with him, and did all he could to ensure it did not get wet, or worse, be lost in the ocean. However, since his phone was also his only digital camera, he could not capture these events while it was in New Zealand being upgraded. Like Hannah, Beni is engaging in practices of digital transnationalism, despite the obstacles of slow WiFi and limited bandwidth on the island.

One day whilst visiting her at work in Niue, Mahofi had her iPad in one hand and a cup of tea in the other and showed me a brightly coloured pair of running shoes that she was thinking of buying off eBay. Mahofi is in her early twenties and

works in the private sector as a shop assistant. Because Niue doesn't have shopping malls she was using public WiFi to shop for shoes on her morning tea break. Mahofi explained her need to shop online because of the limited selection on the island. She patiently waited for each page to load, cordially conversing between each. With several taps and a few moments to load, her screen landed on another pair of shoes she was considering. She began weighing up the different options of style, brand, and colour, and asked for my opinion. She discussed her taste in fashion—where she bought her clothes and why—and although she emphasised that she hadn't purchased anything in a long time, without the Internet she would not have access to the things she wanted.

Mahofi believed that New Zealand fashion influenced the fashion in Niue. She realised that she probably learned about the latest fashion trends through Facebook, what her friends and family in Auckland were wearing, watching movies and music videos, TV, and the odd magazine that was left behind by visitors and tourists. She admitted that some of the clothes were not appropriate to wear in Niue, but she enjoyed just looking at them anyway. Mahofi strategically used the resources she accessed to keep track of and acquire the latest fashion. Each of her online purchases was considered in terms of the logistical problems of “getting it here.” She navigated the many hurdles of living on a small island with a small population, which has a limited amount of bandwidth, in order to obtain goods that are normally unavailable.

One strategy that Mahofi used to ensure that her purchases would be the right size, colour, and style was to send specific instructions, photos, and ‘links’ to the

purchaser. Once her decision was made, Mahofi advised me that it required highly-skilled coordination to get the shoes off the screen and onto her feet. In the past, she has asked friends or family who were travelling to buy something for her and bring it back, often reimbursing them via online money transfer. She recalled a time she thought she had given enough instructions to her aunt who asked her what she would like for Christmas, which was a pair of 'chucks' in a size nine. But when her aunt arrived for the holidays and was handing out gifts, it was apparent that she had bought a men's not a women's size nine. Although Mahofi was grateful for the thought and effort, she was disappointed that she wouldn't have a new pair of shoes to start the new year and the shoes were given to her brother instead.

Mahofi had also bought small items directly from a website that were delivered via post. Otherwise she would wait for her own trip abroad to go shopping in person. Each option required a component of digital communication, co-ordination, and research. For example, Mahofi knew one of her work colleagues had a regional conference coming up, and asked her if she could spare some luggage space for the shoes she planned to buy. If it was all was to run smoothly, Mahofi would buy the shoes online, have them delivered to her family's address, her cousin would then pass them to her colleague during the brief stopover in Auckland, and her new shoes would arrive safely on "plane day." Mahofi, Benni, and Hannah illustrate individual experiences of the ICTs infrastructure of Niue, and are actively finding work-arounds to foster their desire for transnational communication, regional politicking, and online shopping.



## The Demand for Broadband in Niue

Niue's communicative ecologies have enabled the digital transnationalism that Sana's and Mahofi's experiences display. Without the access to digital media, the co-construction and negotiation of Niuean identities would not be as prominent or prolific. Yet could the digital transnationalism I had observed be even greater in instance and reach? Throughout my fieldwork, Niueans negotiated the tools and technologies they had available, and a major theme was their desire for more. Despite access limitations, the relationship Niueans have with technology mediated the ways they were sustaining transnational connections with family and diaspora in Auckland, engaging in regional debates and political agendas, as well as creating meaningful connections with the rest of the world. Mahofi's desire for a new pair of shoes reveals an individualised incorporation of ICTs and social media into day-to-day life for Niueans. This incorporation of ICTs is continually negotiated amid more meta debates about 'divides', 'equity,' and 'access.' For Niue, the 'digital divide' is not a question of gaining access over none at all, but more about the quality of the access they do have, and the access to which they aspire. Jenkins (2009) and Jenkins et al. (2005) refer to this as the "participation gap" that emphasises the social, cultural, and educational concerns that impede full access to global participation (via new media). Jenkins suggests that 'digital literacy' is the new 'hidden curriculum,' and the learning gap is revealed when informal learning fails to take place as people interact with digital media, where they should develop certain skills, competencies, and literacies (Jenkins et al. 2005: 3).

Regionally, the Pacific's telecommunications sectors have undergone deregulation and reform since 2003, driving down prices and fuelling a boom in mobile phone and social media use (Cave, 2012). Although Niue is not included in Cave's (2012) study, it underscores the implications for the region of the South Pacific and its unrealised potentials. Cave suggests that these new tools have been underutilised and "Pacific Island governments, the private sector and international donors could make far better use of the region's ICT revolution, in particular, supporting more effective resource allocation and greater service delivery, by using digital tools such as mobile applications and crowdsourcing" (Cave, 2012: 1). This more competitive, open market has resulted in increased access to media and communication technologies via mobile handsets, and in turn, radical transformations in the media and communicative ecologies of each context (Tacchi et al., 2013). For example, Cave's study reveals that in Fiji, approximately 72% of the entire population uses mobile phones. With a population of around 880,000 people, around 114,000 Fijians are Internet users, with thousands using social network sites like Facebook. In Kiribati (population 106,000), the least developed nation listed in *Australia's International Development Assistance Program: Budget 2011-12*, 35% of the population use mobile phones, 0.03% use social network sites such as Facebook, and 0.07% use the Internet. Social media on the mobile platform is providing the people of the Pacific Islands with an easy and low-cost way to engage in domestic, regional, and international dialogues. Cave positions her study to articulate the potential of ICTs in the South Pacific as a mode of development, and therefore also promotes the need to develop the ICT infrastructures and policies.

Similarly, a recent World Bank study (Qiang, 2008) indicates that a 10% increase in broadband penetration results in a 1.38% increase in GDP growth in low and middle income countries. This impact stems from (1) reduced transaction costs for business, government, and household communications; (2) new business opportunities such as investments in e-commerce and business process outsourcing facilities; and (3) improved public service delivery, particularly to support e-education and e-health services. Based on the data from the World Bank study, Tonga gained funding to connect the Southern Cross Cable from Fiji to Tonga (landed in June 2013). The project cost \$US34 million and was funded by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Tonga Communications Corporation. Tonga is the first of a number of SIDS to be linked as part of ADB's proposed Pacific Regional Connectivity Program (PRCP), in which affordable high speed Internet is couched as the solution to be able to keep up with growing bandwidth demand in Tonga, facilitating "social cohesion with their relatives residing abroad and improve disaster risk management" (ADB, 2011: 4). The aim is to connect Samoa, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu to the global communications networks by submarine fibre optic cable, with smaller island economies in the North Pacific such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, and Palau to be connected in later years, by either cable or satellite. Significantly, Niue is not on this initial list.

Tonga's telecommunications market is very different to that of Niue and the other islands in the region. It was the first country in the Pacific to liberalise its telecommunications sector. At the proposal stage of the PRCP, mobile phone penetration in Tonga was among the highest in the region, and local and

international call tariffs were among the lowest in the Pacific. Internet penetration, however, remained low with about 2,500 subscribed broadband Internet users (ADB, 2011). This was primarily due to the high cost and limited availability of bandwidth via satellite, which meant only two telecommunications operators were Internet Service Providers (ISPs) at the time. Bandwidth was previously 20 to 30Mbps and has increased by approximately 50,000% to a bandwidth of up to 10Gbps with the fibre optic link. As a result, competition in the telecommunication industry is becoming more competitive as more players enter the market. This should result in reduced subscription costs for Tongans and lead to a greater adoption of the Internet. There is no set future date for further increases to Niue's ICT infrastructures, either via satellite or a submarine cable link. Niue is considerably smaller than Tonga, and the feasibility of the fibre optic cable remains tenuous. According to Warf (2006), satellite remains a more cost-effective option when covering long distances. Tonga's recent link to fast broadband Internet is often cited as an example of hope by Niueans when they express their desire for better Internet. At this stage, however, it is unlikely to eventuate.

I discussed concepts of 'access' and bridging the 'divides' and 'gaps' in the Pacific with one of the board members of Niue's Internet Users Society, in particular, the challenges of the Internet for Niue and their aspiration for faster, better Internet. As the board member expressed it to me, "Tonga just got the cable, but it seems almost impossible for us to get it too... We're just too small, and the cost would outweigh the possibility of it landing in Niue. The cost to bring it here to begin with is one thing, but the ongoing maintenance costs..." he said as he shook his

head. “But you know, there’s the whole argument that the Internet is a human right, and all of that... So why shouldn’t we be able to get it?” What we didn’t realise at the time was that the same discussion was happening in Apia, at the third annual United Nations SIDS conference, and our conversation was echoed in the announcement that Digicel plans to partner with other private investors and connect the South Pacific islands to deliver fast Internet (Leoni, 2014).

However, again, Niue is distinctly not on the list of countries in this announcement. When speaking with the same contact later that week, the excitement over the possibility of connecting the whole South Pacific via the submarine cable had spread. However, my contact remained sceptical, believing it would probably take many years to come to fruition. Moreover, my contact argued that even if connectivity was achieved for the other islands, Niue may never have the same opportunity. Although they had reservations about the broadband connection ever becoming a reality for Niue, they were happy that there was recognition of the need for equitable access to the Internet for SIDS.

Significantly, another iteration of this debate occurred six months later at the Pacific Summit on ‘IT Connectivity in the Pacific.’ Held in Auckland in May of 2015, the desire for faster connectivity for Niue was voiced again. This time it was investigating another option of boosting the satellite feed via New Zealand, which would potentially be administered by Telecom Niue (Tauafiafi, 2015). There is no confirmation upon the publication of this article whether this option will go ahead, nor is there a report on costing available to the public.

Niue is an example too of the blend of ICTD and public WiFi agendas, and a national vision for a strong and reliable Internet connection is a way to ensure the reduction of any 'digital divide' or 'participation gap', thus facilitating a 'brighter future.' Initially, public WiFi was envisioned to service both the government and its people for free; however, because of the inability for the network to satisfy the need for a reasonable level of connectivity, the Niue government began constructing its own network separate from the Internet Niue public WiFi network. Even so, more upgrades are required to both networks to increase the level of accessibility for both official administrative and public consumption purposes.

## Conclusion

As the ongoing upgrades to public Wi-Fi and uptake of OLPC indicate, Niueans have a relatively long history of using ICTs and the Internet. In fact, Sione (in the introduction of this chapter), who is now almost thirty, remembers when public WiFi was first established in Niue in 2003, and explained to me that he was exposed to ICTs from a young age, learning how to use a computer in primary school. He reflected upon the possible impact of ICTs and commentated that he felt that he had benefitted from several technological initiatives in Niue, such as One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) and public WiFi. Sione found it almost offensive that people in seemingly more developed nations are surprised to know that Niue is "pretty up to date." Similarly, Sana already had a PC at home that her family shared, and had access to the computers at school when the OLPC initiative had commenced in 2008. Although it was not seamlessly integrated into the school curriculum, Sana was able to access public WiFi on her 'Facebook

laptop,’ and described the ways she and her friends experimented with a new level of personal agency provided by this individualised access to technology.

Sione and Sana’s experiences illustrate a high level of ‘digital literacy’ and familiarity with ICTs. This has shaped Niueans’ current interactions with the public WiFi and provides an insight into the assumptions and contextual discontinuities that occurred in the implementation of public WiFi and OLPC, and the ways that Niueans have navigated these. The vision of a fast-paced technology and its related connectivity is confounded by the fact that public WiFi and, by extension, the experience of the Niuean Internet, is slow. Although outdated by the time of my research in 2014, the 2011 census showed a high level of ICT ownership and digital literacy. These 2011 figures, however, do not account for the rise in the number of tablets and smart phones that most of the participants interviewed had acquired in the subsequent years. Over time, the move from a community internet café model to the individualisation of ICT and internet use has resulted in growing data demand and consumption on the public WiFi network. As more and more people obtained the technology to access the Internet, new challenges emerged. Despite several upgrades over the years to accommodate for the growth in usage, the limited bandwidth capacity of Niue’s satellite connection means that the speed of WiFi is a constant point of frustration for Niueans. As a result, demands on download and bandwidth capacities in Niue outweigh the ability to supply satisfactory internet speeds.

Similarly, Niue no longer subscribes to the OLPC program, mainly due to the incompatibilities mentioned by Sana (and other participants). However,

participants of this study who were involved in OLPC are now older and have since graduated from high school. They are highly capable young men and women and acknowledge the presence of ICTs as part of their childhood that resulted in their current familiarity with ICTs and social media. In addition, the free education system and funding from the New Zealand Government played a part, and OLPC contributed to Niueans' appetite for transnational communication and social media via ICTs. Although Niueans consider themselves fortunate to already have strong ICT infrastructures, there is a desire for more.

The frustration that participants in Niue express concerns the quality of the access they have, and to which they aspire. Jenkins (2009) and Jenkins et al. (2005) refer to this as the 'participation gap,' which emphasises the social, cultural, and educational concerns that impede full access to global participation (particularly via new media). Jenkins suggests that 'digital literacy' is the new 'hidden curriculum' that is gained during the informal learning that takes place as people interact with digital media, developing certain skills, competencies, and literacies via their surroundings. The lack or inability to experience, learn, and contribute in this environment is primarily where the 'gap' is revealed (Jenkins et al., 2005, p. 3). In this case, Niueans living on the island stress that while they have access to the internet via what is effectively free public WiFi, this does not enable them to participate fully in the ways that other people situated in other countries do. They can access Facebook, but not as a ubiquitous platform. They may watch YouTube, but only when they have carefully planned how and when to access information and entertainment. All of the tropes of the digital world—ubiquitous, 24/7 access, information at your fingertips—simply



do not resonate with Niueans' experience of the internet. And this is despite what is viewed as a comparatively forward-looking, innovative country, when it comes to public access and infrastructures, especially public WiFi (Cave, 2012; Tacchi, Horst, Papoutsaki, Thomas, & Eggins, 2013) and OLPC (BBC News, 2008BBC News, 2008).

Niue's ICTD initiatives suggest that Niueans see ICTD as aligning with *Niue ke monuina*, the national project of creating a prosperous and sustainable Niue. In an attempt to reduce the 'participation gap' and be on the right side of the 'digital divide,' Niue allowed the sale of '.nu' to fund Niue's public WiFi in 2003, and took part in other initiatives such as the OLPC Oceania initiative in 2008. These were fuelled by the desire for Niueans to be internationally competitive, in an endeavour to 'keep up' with the rest of the world. These developmental agendas are situated amid instances of relationship mediation with friends and family overseas, consumption of social media, accessing information and world news, as well as being able to perform the administrative tasks to run the country. As a result, Niueans have a relatively high level of access to the Internet; however, they feel that they are inhibited from the full utilisation of the tools and platforms, that are generally designed for and more readily accessible with faster Internet speeds. They therefore still feel a 'gap' and 'divide' in their experience of the Internet.

The desire for Niueans to be internationally competitive and to 'keep up' with the rest of the world was a key motivation for the sale of the '.nu' domain, which would then fund Niue's national internet. Yet, like studies of public WiFi

networks in Canada (Middleton and Crow, 2008) and Australia (Lambert et al., 2014), the imagined outcomes can be exceeded in some instances, but are also often never met. Initially, public WiFi was envisioned to service both the government and its people for free; however, because of the inability of the network to satisfy the need for a reasonable level of connectivity, the Niue government began constructing its own network. Similarly, further upgrades were made to the public WiFi, and these required the introduction of a small fee to remain viable. These upgrades are all motivated by the assumption that increases in bandwidth have the ability to facilitate a greater level of access to 'global participation' for Niueans (Jenkins; 2009).

Development strategies, whether ICTD-based or not, whether internal or external initiatives, all generally work with the notion of an imagined future. For Niue, this is a future that is prosperous, yet preserves environmental and cultural stability. The imagination of these 'developed futures' often depicts economic prosperity and societal order. Channelling funding into education and ICTs is part of Niue's way of aligning with and creating the prosperous Niue being envisioned. The idea of sustainable development in Niue can be seen as a distinct blend of what used to be referred to as first-world and third-world issues. Niue has all the technological and societal constructs of the 'first,' 'west,' or 'developed' world, yet still has problems with financial limitations and dependence upon international aid in a way that is similar to less economically developed countries. Due to its low population, small land size, and geographic isolation, Niue's economic growth is impeded on several fronts.

Ultimately, Niue wishes to gain economic footing and competitiveness as a nation. And like most contemporary development goals and interventions, Niue also aims to create a 'brighter future' for its people in their everyday lives. Discussions with participants surrounding the future development of Niue have shaped the overall themes of this chapter: the investigation of sustainable development goals of Niue and how ICTs are used as a means, among a suite of development goals for Niue, to create, develop, and maintain the nation. It is important to examine Niue's concerns and development goals as a whole, and how these boil down to the negotiation of the sustainability, 'viability,' and perhaps 'legitimacy' as a nation. Niueans negotiate a unique blend of infrastructures and political agendas that dictate levels of 'access' and the realisation of their 'capabilities' and the ability to exercise 'choice.' With this in mind, this chapter has provided textographs of the infrastructures and communicative ecologies at play in Niue, all of which Niueans navigate on a daily basis while 'living out' the theoretical discussions on these pages.

Today, the green and white OLPC machines are barely seen in the technology landscape of Niue. Despite the lack of sustainability and poor integration of the OLPC laptops into the Niue school curriculum, a lasting impact of the ICT focused initiative can be seen today, in that they helped many parents to recognize their value, and have thus recently chosen to invest in laptops, tablets, and smartphones. In Sione's words, this makes Niueans quite 'up to date.' Niue has not chosen to foster the OLPC programme any longer for their students; however, investments into ICTs suggest that Niueans see these initiatives as a part of aligning with Niue ke monuina, the national project of a creating

prosperous and sustainable Niue. Participants who are participated in OLPC at the time, are now older and have since graduated from high school, and they are highly capable young men and women. They acknowledge the presence of ICTs in their childhood and credit these with their current familiarity with ICTs, the Internet, and social media. Yet the free education system and funding from the New Zealand government have surely also played a part. At the very least, the recent upgrade of the computers at the high school offers the potential for a more efficient way of delivering the education experience to the students of Niue. The OLPC campaign allowed the children of Niue to have ownership of a piece of ICT, whether it was a tool that seamlessly dovetailed with their formal education curriculum or not. Students benefitted from this 'digital literacy' and a chance to bridge the 'digital divide' (Prensky, 2001; Brown and Czerniewicz, 2010; Compaine, 2001; Pigato, 2001).

In conclusion, this chapter presents the historical background to Niue, explains the development of communication infrastructures there, and describes how Niue was the first nation to offer free WiFi to all residents. This is significant, as this historical relationship with ICTs and technology has impacted Niueans' capacity to engage with digital media. Later chapters will further contextualise instances of digital transnationalism; however, this chapter investigates the notion that these exchanges and displays of digital transnationalism would not be possible without the participation of Niueans in Niue.

As described in this chapter, Niue only installed a mobile GSM network in late 2012, which is relatively late compared to other nations, even other SIDS, and yet

it has had free WiFi since 2003. Since that time, the cost of PCs and laptops has dropped, and there has been an increase in the disposable income of Niueans. This has resulted in an increase in the acquisition of personal computers, tablets, and smart phone devices. As a result, a high digital literacy and ubiquitous uptake of digital media is evident, contrary to assumptions that SIDS are less technically fluent than the West. This chapter highlights how, although it is one of the smallest of the Pacific Island states, it has the highest level of internet penetration in the Pacific region and presents a compelling case study of digital transnationalism.

## **Chapter 4:** *Revitalising Niue: A Joint Mission*

*Today there is a meteorological and climate change workshop being held, aimed at tapping into ‘traditional knowledge banks’ of the Niuean people in order to join these with modern systems and technologies and develop natural disaster action plans and contingencies for Niue.*

*This weekend is ‘Kai Niue,’ the first national food festival aimed at raising the status of local food and produce in Niue by promoting innovative ways of preparing traditional ingredients. The food festival by both being a fun and creative outlet for the people is geared to help to combat the trend of choosing imported goods over locally grown produce, and ensuring the future ‘food security’ of Niue.*

*Last week there was a workshop on maintaining the Niue language, in both written and spoken form – The workshop looked at cementing the technicalities of vagahau Niue grammatical structures, as well as exploring the future of expanding the Niue language with words not yet known to the vernacular.*

*The week before, it was a call to the local ‘heritage artists’ to gather and prepare for an ‘artist exchange,’ to share and impart their skills with those in New Zealand. This is a project funded by Creative NZ, and although this organisation has funded similar projects for Tonga and Samoa, this is the first such project for Niueans.*

*And last month I attended a showcase of cultural dance and song presented by Alofi South as part of their annual show-day programme. The village members were working on a special project to make a distinction between the 'traditional' and contemporary. That night was to showcase the 'traditional'.*

*The past few weeks have been busy with celebrations of Niue's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 'Self-governance', and the rhetoric during this time is in the assessment of whether Niue has 'made it' – Has Niue made that 'name' for itself? As quoted in one of the officiating speeches at the commemorative Flag Raising event; 'they say, life begins at forty', the speaker made metaphorical reference of a 'coming of age' for Niue, a time of reflection and vision casting. These sentiments become even more poignant when speech after speech describes a Niue that looks forward into the future, with a vision for the next forty years.*

*I am observing a great amount of what I would say is very similar to the 'Niue pride' phenomenon in Auckland, which surprises me. The push to 'preserve' and maintain vagahau Niue, and traditional dance and hand-crafts was very prevalent whilst I was in Auckland, but I was intrigued to find that there was also such a strong push on the island as well – It is a deliberate and considered intent, not just a 'natural way of life' like I imagined (or romanticised, perhaps?).*

- Fieldnotes (October 2014)

This chapter focuses on the undercurrents of transnationalism and identity, and how notions of Niuean identity are being constructed, contested and promoted, both in Niue and in Auckland. I first introduce how Niueans in Niue articulate a desire for the preservation of their culture and identity, and juxtapose these with practices in Auckland. Subsequent chapters in this thesis build upon this

transnational desire to preserve, place-make, reproduce, and revitalise Niuean culture and identity, and how digital media supports, extends, and enhances this phenomenon.

The earlier excerpt from my fieldnotes emphasises the ways in which development and development agendas were heavily tied to a desire to sustain, revitalise, and reproduce not only economic stability, but also social welfare and cultural practices for Niueans in Niue, and contrast with practices in Auckland. This chapter first explores the ways Niueans in Niue articulate what it means to maintain Niuean culture, and how the responsibility is shared across the ocean to include Niueans residing in Auckland. The question of the how, why, and where of Niuean identity is increasingly important as Niuean identity is negotiated beyond a single geographically bound site of production, with negotiations occurring in the small island developing state of Niue, the diasporic migrant communities in Auckland, and mediated through increased activity online.

In Niue, the idea of preserving Niuean culture is entangled in the idea of a prosperous and economically sustainable country, reflected in the tagline “Niue ke Monuina – A prosperous Niue,” by preserving Niue itself. This is a Niue that meets economic as well as social and environmental needs. This became even more apparent as Niue became abuzz with ‘nation-making’ activities during October of 2014, celebrating forty years of self-governance. The earlier excerpt from my fieldnotes encapsulates the prevalent desire to preserve Niuean culture and identity in Niue, and the transnational approach Niueans were also taking,



'linking arms' with those residing in Auckland. There is a transnational interest in maintaining, revitalising, and preserving Niue and Niuean culture and identity. As the majority of Niueans are diasporic, residing overseas, the desire to maintain the Niuean culture was shared transnationally.

### **Identity: Being Tama Niue**

Throughout this research study the idea of culture and tradition is inextricably linked to identity; in particular, how Niueans see their familial bonds, village, and culture as informing their personal identity. My conversations with Niueans in Niue and Niueans in Auckland are woven together throughout my thesis to present a collective picture of how Niueans define what it means to be Niuean, how they navigate multi-faceted conceptions of identity, and why these are part of a broader motivation to revitalise and maintain Niuean-ness for the future. Shifting definitions of culture thus also speak to the shifting meaning of culture. Conceptions of culture "has far-reaching implications for our understanding and interpretation of identity. A clarification of the new meaning of culture not only sheds light on the contemporary context in which identities are being reconstituted, but it also clarifies the need to situate the analysis of identity in different dimensions of social and cultural situations" (Hermann et al., 2014: 11). As suggested, especially in cases of migration and transnationalism, identity is no longer seen as exclusive, individual, or indivisible, but as multiple constructions across different, often intersecting, discourses, practices, and positions. As a result, understandings of identity have shifted from a singular, discreetly-bounded entity to a multi-faceted one that is contradictory to the original understandings of culture and identity. Nevertheless, especially when looking at

transnational identities, the focus is now on multi-layered and composite characteristics as well as their fluid nature (Clifford, 1988; Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999; Smith, 2001; Hannerz, 2003). The cultural position of Niuean immigrants in Auckland may have become displaced, but the link to their homeland remains a crucial component of their conception of self, reflected even in the organisation of expatriate social groups on the basis of original village identities (which have become more visible via social media).

For example, a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews revealed that being *tama Niue* to the Niuean in Niue is matter of location of birth, the origins of blood-lines, and a matter of being in Niue, doing Niuean things:

It means that I am from Niue and Niue blood runs through my veins. I am one that dwells in Niue and understands the culture and traditions as a Niuean... But most importantly, I am one that is proud of being *tama Niue*. (21 y/o, female, tertiary student, resident of Niue)

Being *tama Niue* means speaking and doing things as Niuean - having Niuean Blood in your veins and living in Niue. I think that to be a *tama Niue* means you have to know the culture and traditions of a Niuean person, both inside and out. (26 y/o, male, public service officer, Niuean resident of Niue)

I'm from Niue and I should be proud of that. Going to the bush, speaking the language, and respecting cultural traditions. (46 y/o, male, business owner and resident of Niue)

When the same question was asked of Niueans in Auckland:

To me to be Niue is... (having trouble articulating)... to be Niue you gotta want to know your language... and the values we have as Niuean... you know, respect... just know your culture really, aye?... Identity... I could be here and say, 'yeah - I'm Niuean' ... participate in Niuean stuff, and Niuean events, be proud -- if there's any Niuean projects, get involved... But mainly the language, my passion is the language. (56 y/o, male, community leader, Niuean resident of Auckland)

I'm pretty proud of being Niuean... cos it's pretty rare. But I dunno... I kinda like my culture aye?... Probably the food -- just the tradition as well... umm... (21 y/o female, tertiary student, Niuean resident of Auckland)

What does it mean to be Niuean?... I think because I am Niuean, it means everything... Being Niuean, for the sake of my children, and their children, I have to embrace my culture... and even though I'm not too knowledgeable of the customs as such, I need to embrace it because of that sense of belonging... I don't want my daughter growing up not knowing who she is. (47 y/o male, teacher, Niuean resident of Auckland)

The term *Tama Niue* literally means *child of Niue*. However, figuratively, this encompasses a deeper sense of belonging; of bloodlines and cultural knowledge. The idea of what it means to be Niuean differs between those on the island and those now living in Auckland; however, they all wish to maintain and nurture Niuean culture and identity. According to respondents in Auckland it is more than just being *from* Niue, it is a belonging and personification of the essence of

Niue—the living, breathing, walking, talking and dancing Niue, even though they live elsewhere.

As suggested, especially in cases of migration and transnationalism, identity is no longer seen as exclusive, individual, or indivisible, but as multiple constructions across different, often intersecting, discourses, practices, and positions. As a result, understandings of identity have shifted from a singular identity to multiple identities, contradictory to more uniform and definitive understandings of culture and identity. Nevertheless, the focus is now on multi-layered and composite identities as well as their fluidity. However, Niueans, in their desire to revitalise, and maintain the Niuean culture and traditions, are looking to the past to some degree, wanting to retain a sense of ‘same-ness’ and continuity in what it is to be Niuean. This desire to romanticise the past is a reflection of the multi-layered and composite identity Niueans want to somehow avoid.

Niueans both on the island and abroad feel the burden to maintain Niue.

However, a large part of Niuean nation-making is nostalgic, forging a connection to ‘home,’ albeit physically distant. They are intent on keeping the ‘cultural bridge’ open, effective, and transformative. They ask how Niue’s economic viability and livability be maintained if it is left to ‘die out.’ How would Niue’s unique language and culture be kept alive if not for intentional intervention?

Those Niueans who desire to maintain the Niue culture and identity wish all Niueans to band together and build together. Yet there is a growing population who have never been to Niue and are not actively engaging in working to these ends. How secure is Niue’s future if left in the hands of a nation (transnationally spread) who do not do something about it? Efforts in Auckland are as much

about maintaining the physical place of Niue as they are a manifestation of nostalgic symbolism. Preventing Niue from “dying out” is attempted through keeping transnational connections alive in personal communication with family and friends, as well as in overtly nationalistic endeavours such as language classes, cultural arts workshops, and participation in pan-Pacific cultural festivals.

Similarly, Hermann et al’s (2014) edited volume investigates the layered and multi-place nature of transnational cultural reproduction in relation to transnational nature of Oceanic place-making. The volume aims to show that “movement invests place-making and cultural identifications with a new dimension of multiplicity” (2014:2). Hermann et al argue that migration and travel within the Pacific does not involve a severing of ties to land and communities; rather, it is the expansion of a web of multiple spatial and social relationships. Note in the introduction, “These identifications often attest to divergent ascriptions by self and others at local, regional and global levels” (Hermann et al., 2014, p. 2), especially with regard to dimensions of belonging and the multiplicity of place-making. As this thesis also argues, the idea of place-making challenges the static and self-enclosed idea of ‘place,’ but emphasises that it is a changing construction over time that is filled with growing pains and power relations. This is especially visible in instances of mobility, migration, and transnationalism.

The multiplicity of Pacific place-making and *being* versus *belonging* intersect with long-standing anthropological studies of culture and identity. With the rise

of globalisation and movement, neither place-making, nationalism, nor culture can be seen as bounded and static sets of ideas, practices, knowledge, or meanings. Rather, the meaning and concept of culture takes account of this fluidity and multiplicity. Hermann et al remark, “After all, a ‘culture’ can no longer be considered to speak with one voice, so to speak, but it has become apparent we need to take account of internal differentiation, and therefore culture has gradually come to be regarded as multi-vocal and polyphonous” (Hermann et al., 2014, p. 11).

The idea of preserving the Niuean culture in Niue is entangled in the idea of a prosperous and economically sustainable country. This was clearly demonstrated as Niue became abuzz with ‘nation-making’ activities during its self-governance celebrations in October of 2014. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a transnational interest in maintaining, revitalising, and preserving Niue and Niuean culture and identity. As the majority of Niueans are diasporic, the desire to maintain the Niuean culture was shared transnationally.

This chapter further focuses on the undercurrents of transnationalism and identity, on how notions of Niuean identity are being constructed, contested, and promoted. I first introduce an ethnographic picture of how Niueans in Niue articulate this desire for the preservation of their culture and identity, and juxtapose these with performative practice in Auckland. Subsequent chapters in this thesis build upon this transnational desire to preserve, place-make, reproduce, and revitalise Niuean culture and identity, examining how digital media supports, extends, and enhances this phenomenon.

## Bridging Tagata Niue

The relationship between place and identity amid the Niuean transnational social field is characterised by multiplicity. Family and friends in New Zealand heavily influence Niueans in Niue, while Niuean immigrants in New Zealand continue to maintain strong links with their homeland. As aforementioned, Niueans have an ease of mobility between Niue and New Zealand. Niueans in Niue have the freedom to leave and migrate to New Zealand, which is reflected in the relatively low population of around 1,500. However, those who choose to live in Niue claim it is a decision they are proud of. Among other practicalities, these Niueans say they stay out of a national pride and sense of responsibility to keep Niue alive. Yet it is still a choice that gives them the freedom of movement between Niue and New Zealand, and many take advantage of this. Several examples in this chapter investigate the way Niuean nation-making and place-making is manifest in each location, as well as how these efforts are increasingly transnational, and a joint endeavour.

Tāoga Niue is also the name of the government body in Niue intended to harness and facilitate the enactment of “all those things which together make up the spirit and the material being of *tagata Niue* (people of Niue), and to secure the sovereign and ethnic identity of all Niueans” (Tāoga Niue, 2004:9). Although the seeds of inspiration for such an entity have existed for a long time, Premier Young Vivian and his team recognized the poignant need to hold on to ‘all things Niuean’ in the wake of the devastation of cyclone Heta in January of 2004, which destroyed the national museum, most of the displays, archives, and artifacts. The

name of the government body is also the term used in the Niuean vernacular to say 'Niue culture.' The literal meaning of the word *tāoga* is 'treasure' or 'precious possession.' This term also encapsulates the intentional 'treasuring' of Niue. In its broader context the word play conjures the imagery of highly valuing the aspects which make up Niue, such as its language, customs and traditions, heritage arts and crafts, and historical narrative, as well as one's relationship to the land and sea.

Tāoga Niue's vision is that the sovereign and ethnic standing of the people of Niue will be secured and will thrive. This is the driving force in the development and sustainability of Niue as a viable living community. However, the Niuean government also had a vision for the transnational co-construction of what it means to be Niuean:

...To raise the status of Vagahau Niue and to increase its usage, in order to sustain it... To ensure the preservation, survival and continuation of the customs and traditions of Niue, thus securing Niuean identity and sovereignty... To raise the status of the history of Niue through the production of books for the use of students, scholar, researchers and the general public... To continue to sustain and raise the status of all Niue arts and crafts – all aspects of the materiality of culture, including musical instruments, costume and dress, traditional agricultural, fishing, hunting and food preparation tools and practices... The preservation and maintenance of a national library and archive – custodians of the nation's intellectual heritage... Maintain, promote and exhibit Niue's cultural history in a national museum and cultural centre  
(Tāoga Niue, 2004: 168-172).



Materials, methods, customs, place, performance, and traditions tell a tale about a country and its people. From this standpoint Niue has formalised national initiatives to rebuild, restore, conserve, protect, maintain, and promote its culture and history for the benefit of future generations. As stated by one Tāoga Niue representative, “The cost of the survival of Niue, of its culture, of its people, cannot be measured by economics... Our culture, our people are our most precious assets” (Hon Young Vivian, 2004). Some points from the Tāoga Niue Strategy give insight into the motivations of the Niue government and its constituents. Niue wants to focus on the development of programmes to sustain the interest, knowledge, and skills of young people regarding their *tau tāoga*, and to introduce incentive schemes to encourage and assist Niueans to produce works of creative art and literature, both traditional and contemporary.

As a part of this strategy, Tāoga Niue also wished to establish a Tāoga Niue website that includes a range of educational, entertainment, and general knowledge content. Such a website would cater for all age levels, including (if not especially) younger Niueans living abroad. In consultation with other Tāoga sectors, it would promote the production of regular radio, television, and print media pieces for educational and entertainment purposes. The government agency also aimed to establish a central information registry of Tāoga assets, such as artefacts, archaeological items, archive documents, and recordings (audio and visual, including photographs), as well as develop and implement strategies to sustain a meaningful affiliation with Niueans abroad, thus developing a ‘cultural bridge’ (Taoga Niue, 2004). Tāoga Niue refers to the desire of a cultural bridging

between Niueans in Niue and Niueans overseas. Such a bridge would allow for the flow of communication and collaboration.

The motivation to revitalise and reproduce Niuean culture and identity is also present in the Niuean community in Auckland. Although the nation-making activities of Niueans in Niue are heavily connected to practical economic and civic concerns, Niueans in Auckland are aware that the greater populous holds a responsibility to maintain the language and traditions, handing down the treasures of their homeland to the next generation. One participant, Marie, a woman in her late forties who was born in Niue but grew up in Auckland for most of her life, offers her theory on why the Niuean culture needs to be focussed in Auckland:

It's about being visible... it's about really feeling the urge to 'save Niue'... before it disappears... Since Niueans have been exposed to Western society, besides the Missionary influence - I think there's been a missive trickle effect, right from over a hundred years ago... til now - and this is the outcome of that (referring to her earlier comments that not many people know how to speak the language, nor know much about their Niuean heritage and culture)... And it's gonna keep trickling, and trickling and trickling... and because we're multi-ethnic... it's just gonna keep dispersing... that's my theory anyway!...

Marie noted her command of the Niue language is not as it should be, but she was proud of the fact that she could understand what was spoken. Although she was not as fluent as she'd like, she has a level of fluency. Marie had recently started a new entrepreneurial venture after a period of personal illness, which

meant she had left her previous job. She considered herself privileged to have attended good schools and to have received a good education, attributing her success to her love for learning as a child and a reasonably stable and happy childhood. As Marie mentions in the above quote, the multi-ethnic influence in Auckland and the Western influence on the island too have prompted herself and others to search for a 'pure' picture of what Niuean culture and traditions were before outside influences. They have also engendered the motivation to revitalise these cultures and traditions before it is too late. Other participants described acts of acknowledging one's 'roots' as a necessity. Doing so honours the historical narrative of their homeland and how their family came to be in Auckland. Participants highlighted the need to respect the struggles and sacrifices made in order that future generations could have a better chance at happiness and prosperity. They felt that they were working towards this through endeavours to maintain the language and culture in Auckland. Some of my participants are less connected with, or exposed to, the traditions and language than others, and they tend to be less concerned with keeping the traditions "alive" than with keeping in contact with family and attending the odd family gathering. Others make it their mission to cultivate a hunger and desire for such things in others and to actively work towards a vision of a strong, thriving, and vibrant cultural 'presence'. What follows is an account of several 'nation-making' and cultural revitalisation activities as I observed them in Niue and Auckland. These reflect the transnational desire to keep Niue and Niuean culture and tradition alive.

## Maintaining Niue in Niue: Language

As mentioned previously, I was surprised to find that there was such a strong preservation agenda in Niue. I only expected to observe such initiatives in Auckland, sentiments often attributed to diasporic communities. Mailene, a 45-year-old resident of Niue, discussed these observations in relation to her participation in the language workshop listed at the beginning of this chapter. She explained:

We started with a test... I got a few wrong (said with a sheepish grin). One of the questions was 'how many letters are in the Niuean alphabet'... Most people got this question wrong 'cause we all forgot that they added 'R' to it a few years ago – It was fifteen when I went to school, so I just forgot about the 'R' and put fifteen... They also asked what the vagahau Niue word for 'alphabet' was... We got that wrong too. People just guessed, and put *alphabetete* (pronouncing as *alpha-beh-teh*), (laughs).



Figure 15 – Example of incorrect spelling and grammar highlighted in the Niue Star

Mailene lives in one of the outer villages and travels into Alofi every morning to work in the education sector. She has a couple of young children who travel into town with her to go to school, which is common as most people work in Alofi and the education hub housing the early childhood, primary, and secondary schools is in the main village. The children love to hang their heads out the window of the family vehicle on their way to and from school and work. Mailene has a warm and gregarious laugh, and roared when she added: “The Niuean word for alphabet is actually *papahi matatohi*”. Mailene and I laughed at the answer most of them gave on the quiz, which was the transliteration of the English, which is a very common thing for ‘palagi’ words with no Niuean equivalent.<sup>8</sup> Tāoga Niue and the Department of Education jointly hosted the workshop. It was held to equip the public and private sectors with the technical writing skills of vagahau Niue, especially in public relations: “We also were given real examples taken from either public reports, email communication, and the newspaper... We had to look out for grammatical errors and suggest the corrections – It was really good! - They should have more of this kind of workshop” (Mailene).

Moseley’s (2010) research places Niue on the endangered language list, and this has prompted concerns about the possible extinction of the language. McCaffery and McFall-McCaffery (2010) showed that fewer than 5% of New Zealand-born Cook Islanders and fewer than 11% of New Zealand-born Niueans could speak their indigenous languages. McCaffery and McFall-McCaffery predicted that these languages would disappear from use in N.Z. within a generation. They argue that

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<sup>8</sup> I’m often still at a loss when trying to follow a conversation in vagahau Niue - that is until I hear a word closely sounding like English. One example: whilst looking at a list of colours the only one I knew was ‘silver’ because it is ‘siliva’ in Niuean.

because the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau were protectorates and part of the official 'realm' of New Zealand, the languages are official languages of the state, and that N.Z. has an obligation to protect these languages. And although there is a greater 'need' among the communities outside of Niue to protect and preserve the use of the Niuean language, Niueans also recognize the importance for the mother tongue to be maintained.

The Niue Language Commission was appointed by the Niue government in 2013 under the Vagahau Niue Act 2012, and was tasked to monitor the use of vagahau Niue. One undertaking was to ensure that the written vagahau Niue used in the media and international correspondence is of high quality. A quote taken from the workshop information sheet emphasised how inextricably linked language and identity are for Niue, and the need to educate and 'upskill' the people:

"Vagahau Niue is the very core of our tāoga (treasure/culture; referring to Tāoga Niue). It is the medium of our heritage in order to sustain all which makes us a *tagata Niue* (A person from Niue). Because of our small population, and the bombardment of the western way of life and the English language on us, our language is in a very critical situation". In a parallel workshop, English words with no direct vagahau translation and words with several options for translation were being discussed and debated.

Many of the mamatua (elders) don't like the transliteration of English words – you know, 'just Niueanafying them'... Usually it's better to have descriptive terms with existing Niuean words. Like for example, *fale gagao* is the Niuean word for

hospital – which is ‘house for the sick’ in direct translation... rather than saying ‘*hospitali*’, or something like that.

(Jasmin, another workshop participant)

The goal of the workshop was to come to a consensus on translation standards for both contested and new words.

The year 1997 heralded the publication of a revised Niue-English dictionary, not revised since the 197’s dictionary by J.M McEwan. The new edition expanded the dictionary from 4,000 to 10,000 word entries. During the process of writing the Niue National Dictionaries, the panel was challenged to establish basic grammatical explanations of the language. These guidelines are prescribed in the bilingual and vagahau Niue Dictionaries and were shared in the workshop. These workshops were instigated due to concern for the quality of written pieces in vagahau Niue, especially where the vagahau is used to convey information to the public. Many instances were found where basic written vagahau Niue conventions were not followed, and it was in these cases, and for these reasons the workshop was co-hosted by Tāoga Niue and the Niue Education Department. Many government documents and publications are in both Niuean and English, and discrepancies and clumsy translations were an issue that needed to be addressed. The revision endeavoured to minimise these problems and to allow participants to refresh or further improve their knowledge of the written vagahau Niue conventions, as well as to further expand the Niue language.

The language workshop and the other events listed in the excerpt of my fieldnotes earlier in this chapter are examples of Niueans' desire to rebuild, restore, conserve, protect, maintain, and promote Niuean culture and history for the benefit of future generations: "The cost of the survival of Niue, of its culture, of its people, cannot be measured by economics... Our culture, our people are our most precious assets" (Hon Young Vivian; Taoga Niue, 2004). Some points from the Tāoga Niue Strategy give insight into the motivations of nation-making activities for the Niueans of Niue.

### Maintaining Niue in Niue: Food, Land, and Sea



Figure 16 - 2014 Kai Niue logo, retrieved from the Niue Tourism website: [niueisland.com](http://niueisland.com)

'Kai Niue' is an example of the aims to preserve Niueans' relationship with the land and sea. *Kai* is the pan-pacific and Niuean word for food. In 2014 it was the first national food festival aimed at raising the status of local food and produce in



Niue. Agriculture is a very important aspect of Niuean culture, lifestyle, and economy. The majority of households in Niue are subsistence farmers who grow, fish, hunt, and gather food for family consumption and for community obligations, with any surplus being sold at the local market or shared with the wider extended family. The festival was an innovative way to promote the perpetuation of traditional farming and fishing practices over becoming too dependent on imported foods. The food festival was a fun and educational platform that helped to combat the trend of Niueans choosing imported goods over locally grown produce, and to ensure the future food security and traditional agricultural knowledge of Niue.



**Figure 17 - Photo of signage at the Alofi commercial centre**

Food is not only essential for life and people's livelihoods, it also plays a very important role in maintaining culture, customs, and traditions. The food festival coincided with SPC (South Pacific Community) and FAO (Food and Agriculture

Organisation of the United Nations) food security initiatives in the region. It also resulted in *Niue's Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2015-2020*. The main goal of the policy is to ensure that sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is available to the people of Niue. However, the added drawcard from a tourism perspective was an innovative way to promote both food security and to stimulate economic growth through tourism, enticing foreigners and Niueans living abroad to attend the food festival.



**Figure 18 - The cultural showcase - one of the KaiNiue programme events**

Kai Niue was also an opportunity to share traditional food knowledge that may have disappeared or been lost. For example, the above photo is of a showcase of how to prepare and cook a root crop that normally is not consumed because it requires a long cooking time and is tough and hard to eat. As part of this demonstration, the history of a time of severe drought was re-told, alongside cultural dance and songs.

## Maintaining Niue in Niue: Heritage Arts

Another recent initiative to promote the preservation and revitalisation agenda while building a 'cultural bridge' is the *Niue Arts and Cultural Festival*. This week-long festival occurs biennially and a major component is collaborative work between famous artists who reside in New Zealand and Niueans in Niue. It first started in 2009 with intention of encouraging economic growth through tourism, while also re-connecting Niueans offshore with their heritage by drawing them back home to participate. The Chief Executive of the New Zealand Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs Dr Colin Tukuitonga was promoting the initiative at the time. Radio New Zealand quoted Tukuitonga (who is Niuean) saying that, "the aim [of the Niue Arts and Cultural Festival] is to encourage Niueans in New Zealand to reconnect with their homeland and take the opportunity to experience Niuean culture and establish links with their home of origin" (, 2009). The first festival was organised in collaboration with a New Zealand-based group of volunteers called Niue *Fakalataha Ki Mua*, who aimed to support the small Niue economy by hosting a Niue festival run in Niue by Niuean people, in celebration of all things Niue.



Figure 19 - 2015 Niue Arts and Cultural Festival logo - Niue Tourism

*Niue Fakalataha Ki Mua* first came together in 2007 as a result of community engagement workshops with the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (N.Z.). The group was established to identify key areas of interest to Niueans in New Zealand, and to develop ways that could further support community activities and interests. The transnational focus that transpired is significant. A number of projects were developed, including an annual Niue Careers and Education Expo, a Constitution Ball to celebrate Niue as a self-governing nation, a business mission to Niue in 2009, and a Culture and Arts Festival held every two years on Niue island. Several initiatives were directed at the Niuean community in New Zealand, and two at Niue. These decisions suggest that Niueans see the maintenance of Niue's economy and society as being as much the responsibility of the Niuean population in Auckland, and as a greater social field not bound by geography. The Niue Arts and Culture Festival was created to be a new space, place, and reason to bring people 'home.' It was seen as a festivalisation of the emotional links to the 'home land' and Niuean cultural identity.

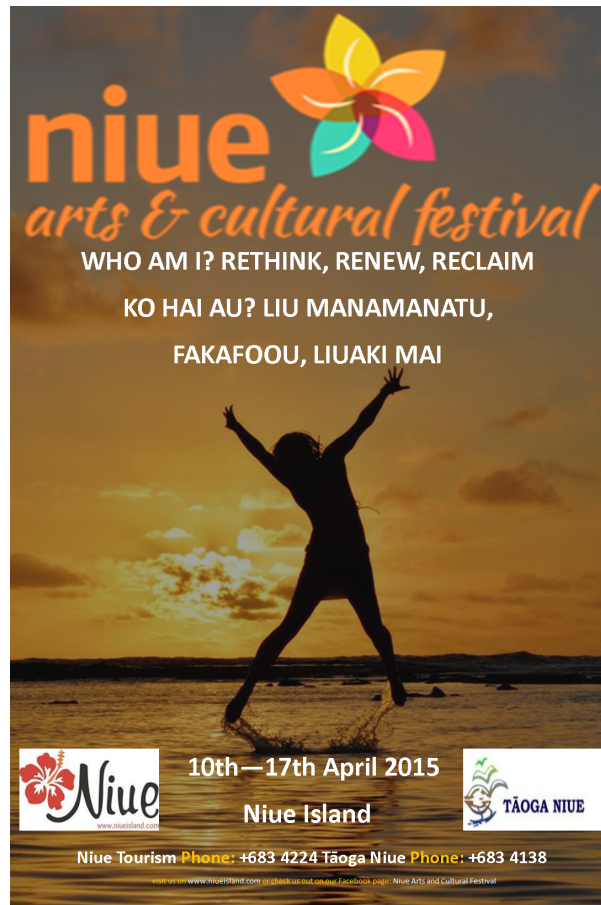


Figure 20 – Flyer for the 2015 Niue Arts & Cultural Festival

*Niue Fakalataha Ki Mua* translates to 'moving or navigating our futures together.' It is a vision of seeing the prosperity of all Niueans, cultivated across the seas and between the shores. It is a nationalism that is occurring beyond the island of Niue, but with the benefit of the 'homeland' in mind. The Niue Arts and Cultural Festival is an embodiment of these sentiments and is seen as a wonderful opportunity to bring together Niueans from all over the world to celebrate the unique sounds, colours, and flavours of Niue. The subtitle of the 2015 Niue arts and cultural festival reflects the work the festival aims to achieve: "Who am I? Rethink, Renew, Reclaim." This articulates the reasoning behind the festival, to



rethink their constructions of identity, renew their connections and passion for their culture and heritage, and reclaim the lost aspects of the Niuean language, traditional arts, and traditions.

Because Niue's population is spread across to New Zealand, the burden to preserve Niue's *tāoga* is recognised to fall on the shoulders on those who live away from Niue. The rhetoric from the Tāoga Niue inauguration ceremony spoke of a 'cultural bridge' and the need to link and work alongside the Niueans abroad. Niue is actively engaging in the 'preservation' of Niue culture and community across Niue and New Zealand. This back and forth sharing, stirring, and shaping is apparent in the projects and programs I have mentioned in this chapter. This idea of 'cultural preservation' and what it means to be Niuean is contested, reinforced, and perhaps sparked through these events. Niue is innovatively working out this 'preservation' and maintenance in ideas such as Kai Niue, the Niue Film Festival, technical language workshops, and the extraction of tradition knowledge in natural disaster plans and strategies. These are often national initiatives (formal government programs and events) because of the small size of Niue. They are intended to support and be interlaced with the day-to-day and personal life of the resident. These then are integrated back into (if they were not already) daily life, with the hope that they will help to maintain all things Niue.

### **Maintaining Niue in Niue: Education and Career Pathways**

Niueans desire to be competitive on the international stage, to ensure that they can 'keep up' with the rest of the world and not be disadvantaged by inexperience with technology and/or poor education. This has prompted a large

focus on equipping the next generation of leaders. To ensure tertiary education entrance, the Niue High School adopts the New Zealand curriculum framework with additional adaptations of heritage arts and vagahau Niue subjects. The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the main national qualification for secondary school students in New Zealand. NCEAs are recognised by employers, and used in the selection process by universities and polytechnics in New Zealand. In the 2015 round of tertiary scholarships offered by the Niue government, the study of hospitality, tourism, and business were prioritised. Ideally, young Niueans who have an interest in the tourism and hospitality sector should obtain a scholarship, graduate, and then return to Niue and use their enthusiasm and education towards building the Niue economy and society.

During my fieldwork, Careers NZ were invited to help establish and support careers education in Niue. This is the first time this type of visit had occurred, and both Niue's Department of Education and Careers NZ saw this as the beginning of a potentially fruitful relationship. At that stage there was no formal careers counseling at Niue High School, but the guidance and counsel that the teachers already gave in conjunction with their normal interaction in the classroom was recognised and celebrated.

In the workshops the students were inspired to dream big, but also be practical, to figure out steps to help get them where they wanted to go, and encourage them to actually take them. These two proceedings at Niue High School highlighted one of the challenges I had observed that impact the young people of

Niue in their career development pathway, *choice*. Due to the limited resources in Niue, on the very practical level, subject choice is restricted, and in some cases, this too will limit the choice one has for further study. One example that was given in the Careers NZ workshop was of a young person who may aspire to be an architect, but did not take math and physics units towards their NCEA. This would generally exclude them from the opportunity to apply for an Architecture course at University.

A real example of this challenge of 'choice' was the cancellation of the digital media and graphic design class in 2014 for Niue High School. This was due to the sudden departure of the teacher and the lack of a qualified replacement in this subject area. Because of this, several students in year 13 (final year of High School) had to change to a science subject. This was very disappointing for the students who could not pursue an avenue of interest and also an additional strain because they had to catch up on the work they had missed out on in the first half of the year. From the response and feedback I had gathered from teachers and students the week of these events, the new technologies and the encouragement from Careers counselors had brought a renewed sense of hope and vision for a 'brighter future' amongst the students. One of greater opportunity.

Similarly, investment in ICTs in Education is seen as an investment in Niue's future. This became evident to me during my fieldwork in October 2014. Forty new computers were installed at the Niue High School as part of Niue's national development plan. This initiative for computer upgrades in the high school was



funded by the Niue and New Zealand governments in addition to the normal allocation for the annual education budget. The new computers were a welcome upgrade to the existing equipment, which was more than five years old, and the old computers were functioning but 'sluggish' and slow, especially when coupled with the limited Internet capacities. These and other ICT investments (which will be discussed further in subsequent chapters) illustrate nationalistic aims linked with education and economic strength and vitality.

The new computers also came along side subscriptions to a student management software, KAMAR, commonly used by schools already in New Zealand. The KAMAR software also requires the networking function as it gives the teachers the ability to submit their class attendance statistics in 'real-time', send messages to one another, and to maintain student profiles and academic performance reviews. I sat in on several training sessions which were held for the teachers on how to navigate the Windows 8 operating system of the computers, the new network, and the new student management system. Separate sessions were held for the students to introduce them to the new system as well, and hand over the new login's and email addresses. The teachers received the KAMAR package well, and in particular felt it would help in the management of students undergoing NCEA standards and the external reporting required.

However, the upgrades in 2014 were not a novel allocation of government and aid funding. In 2008, the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) program, in Niue was in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Council (SPC), arrived in Niue as part of the Pacific pilot roll-out.

## **Maintaining Niue in Auckland: Life, Language, and Culture**

In this section the focus shifts from Niuean revitalisation efforts in Niue to Auckland. Alyssa is a woman in her mid-forties. Her youngest child is eight and her eldest is eighteen. The perpetuation of the Niuean language and culture has been a 'cause' she has been fighting for many years now. She and I met through a referral, and I was told that I should talk to her because "she's really strong on her culture." Although our common contact was not Niuean, nor were they in very close contact, they had gone to the same school growing up and were Facebook friends. Indeed, our mutual contact thought Alyssa's Facebook posts were indicative of her passion for her people and for her work to promote the Niue culture. In part, studies by scholars such as Moseley (2010), McCaffery and McFall-McCaffery (2010), as well as other Māori and Pacific scholars such as McIntosh (2005) and Anae (2006), have influenced Niuean activism to preserve language and traditions. The people I interviewed did not cite specific theorists or authors but expressed similar ideas. Several participants refer to the Niue language being listed as an 'endangered' language (Moseley, 2010), recalling that they had heard about this on the news or by 'word of mouth.'

Alyssa shared her excitement that I was conducting research on a topic she held dear. We met at a café in her local area and started with basic introductions. She was eager to know more about who I was as a person, where she could locate me in my own transnational social field, and why I became interested in studying Niue. After a few more minutes our discussion started to explore the ways in which she located herself as a woman and a mother, and as a descendent from

parents who were born and raised in Niue, but who grew up in Auckland. This is a negotiation she pursues daily, and her ideas of what it means to be Niuean have evolved over time.

Growing up in Auckland has contributed to Alyssa not speaking the language fluently, but she was thankful that at least she could understand it. Alyssa was saddened that she did not have better language skills, but felt this should not stop her or others from claiming that they are Niuean:

I've been here a long time, but I still consider myself Niuean... If anyone asks me - 'I'm Niuean' ... I can't speak, but I understand... Yeah, not very good at speaking... I wish I could... There's something wrong there (referring to her and her siblings not being able to speak Niuean)... but my parents were told not to teach us Niuean - they were told that it would never benefit us... I think they were taught that in primary and high school... and so they stuck to it.

Alyssa's parents not speaking to her in Niuean is a result of the colonialist/missionary history of Niue, which has resulted in her not being able to speak fluently in the Niuean language. She considers this to be "wrong," and this has fuelled her work to learn more about her heritage so that she can pass this knowledge on to her own children.

On the other hand, Jonathan grew up in a later generation than Alyssa and regularly attended a traditional Niuean church in Auckland, learned the language, and some of the history and customs from his family. His family had

migrated to New Zealand to pursue greater job opportunities when he was only two years old. Jonathan admits he never really had a deep appreciation for his culture and just took it for granted. He had never been back to Niue until December of the year before, nor even had an interest in going back until shortly before his trip. It wasn't until a few years ago that he chose to be more engaged with Niuean culture, and he agreed to tutor students for Polyfest. Now that Jonathan has experienced a slice of Niue life he commented: "I wouldn't mind living there... But maybe retirement—after I've had my career and family, and then move back there." Despite really enjoying his short time in Niue last year, he recognised that there are few opportunities in Niue for employment.

When Alyssa and I were talking about the 'loss' of Niuean culture, she shared her experience of when her sister came over from Australia for their grandmother's funeral:

Going to funerals is part of a Niueans life, and I noticed this when my sister came from Australia, 'cause she doesn't go to any of these cultural functions... because she's away from the community... but for us... when she came back... she asked 'what time's the funeral?' - and we said 'oh it's normal time'... assuming that she knew - but she said 'well, what's normal time?'... Oh ok... it's 11 o'clock - between 10 and 11 in the morning... but we didn't realise she didn't know that... because she's been away for so long.

Alyssa recognised that her sister was not familiar with the Niuean cultural practices simply because she does not live near other Niueans so has not "picked

them up along the way.” In that moment Alyssa saw that the things she took for granted were actually not ‘common sense,’ but specific to her family and community, which happens to be made up of people of Niuean heritage.

Alyssa can be described as an activist for all things Niuean, and her focus has been to run cultural workshops for young children in order for them to learn about their heritage. Alyssa’s work to promote language skills and cultural engagement is a form of Niuean nationalism from afar. Like the Haitian example of Georges, Alyssa is active in maintaining emotional ties to Niue, a place she calls home, while living in Auckland. For Alyssa, the drive to keep her own connection to Niue alive has spilled over into teaching younger generations, with the hope they too ‘fall in love’ with Niue. Her desire for the maintenance of the Niue language and culture is also reflective of the distinction of *being* versus *belonging* that Levitt and Schiller (2004) explore. Alyssa’s endeavours to give people a place to experience a sense of belonging to the Niuean community and internalise a sense of ‘ownership’ of Niuean culture and identity. Her advocacy for youth to learn the language and culture is a form of Niuean nationalism, though it takes place in New Zealand.

Similarly, Jonathan, the young man mentioned earlier, shared how as he grows older his desire to learn more about his Niuean heritage increases. He wants a deeper ‘belonging.’ In particular, he shares the significance of the Niue language as he laments not being able to speak it:

It's something that is a part of our culture I feel... and we're just losing it... It's diminishing as the generations progress. With each generation, there's less and less culture present, which is quite sad... But I think, in all honesty, where I am at now, I don't have time to make commitments to go to language classes and invest time in it...

Another interlocutor, an activist for the perpetuation of Niuean language and culture in Auckland, is Jackson, an older man in his early sixties who has lived in Auckland since his late teens. When discussing the 'markers' of the Niuean people in Auckland he suggests:

You can tell [they're Niuean] when they don't speak their own language (laughs)... When they don't speak Niue... That's how you can distinguish them... when you go to Samoans, they talk in their language... even the young people... Tongans - same thing... Niue - Not so much... As much as they'd love to, but they can't speak.... that's the big difference... if you get in a congregation of your young people, and you'd hear the Samoans talking Samoan, Tongans, Tongan. Niue - English (laughs).

Jackson cited the lack of language skills among the Niueans in Auckland as a major motivation for him to work with cultural promotion programs, as does Alyssa. Jackson sat on the board for a Niuean Early Childhood Centre that offers a language immersion program for children in the Niue language.

Jackson advocated the value of the 'language nest' as there were many homes where no Niuean was spoken, and homes where the parents themselves were

never taught the language, yet had a desire for their children to learn. There are Maori schools that follow this valuable principle among the Maori communities across New Zealand. These Maori immersion schools became the model for other Pacific Island groups to do the same. For example, all teaching, interactions, and instructions are in vagahau Niue:

In the homes, no Niuean is spoken, even the parents don't speak the language, and the children go there and will know more words when they go back home... So when they come to school -- it's total immersion, with a few English words to help because some of the children have no Niuean exposure at all. The idea is for total immersion, and for all the lessons to be in Niuean...

It was through these early childhood centre networks that I was introduced to Natasha. Although Natasha felt she was unable to contribute to my research, she had her child enrolled in a Niue immersion school that Jackson advocates in the hope that her child would be exposed to the language.

Jackson uses his own family dynamics to highlight what he calls a 'battle':

My kids can understand, but it's an ongoing battle with us... you know, we speak English and most of the time they're out there exposed to English in school and work environment...

Jackson's wife is part Niuean and is familiar with the language because she was brought up around her grandmother, who spoke to her in Niuean. But her own lack of confidence to speak the Niuean language meant that she and Jackson

mostly spoke English at home. Jackson felt he was fighting a constant 'battle' to keep the language, history, and culture of Niue going so that this generation will be able to pass it on to the next, and so on.

These sentiments were also echoed by Samantha, a woman of similar age to Jackson:

If we don't do something about it now... Then our future generations will blame us - why did our elders allow our language and culture to die... So rather than just talk about it - if we all did something about it... where better than to start with your own family... start doing classes with the family... but everybody's got their own lives, you know it's hard to get everyone together... My niece is half Tongan, and she's married to a Tongan, so I was like 'so your Tongan is safe'... 'but we need to nurture you on the Niuean culture, and language'... And I want to get in there before the Tongan gets in there too strong... If I don't leave anything else, I can at least leave this world knowing that I've taught you how to speak Niue... (laughs).

Her own form of Niuean nationalism was to leave a legacy of language perpetuation for her family, although she knew they may never actually live in Niue. She had a desire for the Niuean language and culture to be strengthened, reinforced, and remain alive in Auckland.

Sally, a young woman of Niuean descent, was also highly 'engaged' and 'connected' to the Niuean community in Auckland. She chose to spend most of her time in and among Niueans. She said, however, that her actions are not



necessarily done out of national pride, but more because she is very community- and family-orientated. Sally volunteers as a youth leader in church and teaches at a Niuean early childhood centre. She has a passion for youth empowerment in general, which resulted in her also volunteering to join forces with other like-minded Niueans to organise *Fuata Matala*, a Niue Youth conference that supplements the 'identity work' of Polyfest (Polyfest is discussed in Chapter Six). She has a responsible role in her church as a youth leader. She attends church on Sundays and at least one night during the week for youth meetings. She sometimes attends on additional nights if there is a special event to prepare for. Sally is also an early childhood educator for a Niue immersion school (one of a handful in Auckland).

Among the people I met in Auckland was an interesting spectrum of what I call 'Niue engagement.' This engagement was evident in the participation and planning of events, workshops, and theatrical productions. These are all examples of the ways Niueans in Auckland are engaging and negotiating what it means to be Niuean. As respondents verbalized in interviews, and as I observed during my fieldwork, being Niuean in Auckland is to be proud of the traditions and language. This is evident in how one spends one's time and energy. However, as Sally's example shows, she sees being Niuean as more about being family- and community-orientated.

### **Maintaining Niue in Auckland: Arts, Events, and Workshops**

When I arrived in Auckland to start my fieldwork in 2014, I was in time to attend a theatre production called 'My Name is Pilitome' that was written and directed

by the Niuean-born, New Zealand-raised writer Vela Mansaute. The play had an all-Niuean cast and was shown over three nights in a local performing arts centre in South Auckland. This was the play's second season. It was back by popular demand and planned to coincide with the ANZAC commemoration ceremony of the Niueans who fought in the First and Second World Wars.<sup>9</sup> The production introduced Filimona, a New Zealand born / South Auckland raised 'wanna-be'-gangster who goes 'back home' to Niue for the first time. The play, despite its setting in Niue, is a story of what it means to grow up Niuean in New Zealand. Filimona's experiences in the play are a comedic portrayal of the cultural and societal clashes that occur when New Zealand-born Niueans go to Niue for the first time. It is a story about self-discovery, re-connection with 'family' and 'home,' and honouring ancestry.

The play was in large part both a summary and prelude of the themes of 'preservation' and 'return and reconnection' that I found throughout the research process. The concept of 'finding' this connection resonated deeply with one research participant. Martin is a 21-year-old university student who moved from Niue to Auckland with his family when he was two years old. When Martin and I discussed his thoughts about the play, he laughed as he shared how he really identified with Filimona: "I went back to Niue for the first time last year... I didn't really know what to expect, but I loved it in the end... Nearly everything that happened in the play to Fili-G—that's what happened to me... except my cousins were actually nice to me." Like the main character of the play, Filimona,

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9 ANZAC Day (Australia, New Zealand Army Corps) - 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2014

Martin grew up in an area called Mangere in South Auckland that is known for its vibrant Pacific Islander community. Both Martin and Filimona's experiences are a portrayal of the issues and agendas that being Niuean in New Zealand present, of which many of my New Zealand-Niuean interlocutors engaged with daily. Martin described his experience as similar to Fili-G's and commented, "The play was 'on point.' It kinda told my story—I am that guy from Mangere, who went to Niue expecting everything to be the same as in New Zealand... but little did I know, it wasn't." Unlike Fili-G. however, Martin is fluent in the language and believes he was more familiar with the Niuean culture.



Figure 21 – My Name is Pilitome Promotional Flyer

The play was predominantly in vagahau Niue and much of the laughter was elicited from ‘inside jokes’ and the parody of Niuean customs and cultural expectations. One such example is blatantly addressed in the title of the play itself; meaning “My Name is Uncircumcised.” It is both a comment about Filimona’s ‘outsider status’ having grown up in New Zealand, and about the fact that he was uncircumcised, and circumcision is practiced in Niue. In the play, Filimona is teased and hazed by his cousins. He is unfamiliar with the food and customs, which fuels his initial dislike of Niue. However, as the play progresses, he recognises he has a deeper connection to his ancestors, his family, and his homeland as a result of this experience.

The writer and director Vela Mansaute has been involved in several other successful plays and musicals over the years; however, this was his first production that concentrated on his Niuean ancestry. His previous work addressed broader Pasifika issues and audiences. Productions such as ‘Factory’ (which toured Australia and then played at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2014), ‘Once were Samoans,’ and ‘Strictly Brown’<sup>10</sup> reflect the tensions of trans- and multi-nationalism and modernity, as well as the experiences of Pacific communities in Auckland. These themes are cleverly experimented with in creative productions. In particular, ‘My Name is Pilitome’ highlights the expectations and responsibilities of diasporic family ties, and concepts and concerns regarding culture and identity for Niueans in New Zealand.

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10 Just to name a few productions by Kila Kokonut Krew - <http://www.kilakokonutkrew.com/>

Respondents address cultural ‘preservation’ and reproduction in several ways. In *My Name is Piletome*, the creative arts are used as a mirror and a mouthpiece to explore statements about personal and group identity and culture. Jackson focused on passing down traditions and language within the family unit, and works to provide an opportunity for other families to learn via Niuean language nests. Several respondents also described how the language and values learnt in the home (or a lack of learning) were visible in aspects of public life, such as the Polyfest or Pasifika festivals, in theatre and arts, and in cultural workshops.

It is also in the arts where Alyssa helps to facilitate a ‘coming home’ experience for young Niueans in Auckland. The community organisation she supports holds regular cultural workshops on skills such as the traditional arts of weaving, wood carving, and learning Niuean song and dance. Many workshops are organised in partnership with more formal co-operatives and obtain funding from both corporate and government bodies.

The images that follow are promotional flyers for two cultural workshops in Auckland that were intended to spark and cultivate a passion to pursue a personal connection to the Niue culture identity and a deeper sense of ‘Niue Pride.’ The first image (Figure 22) is for a language workshop, focusing on learning the traditional Niuean chants. The second image (Figure 23) is a workshop, held during the school holidays, for young Niueans to learn how to weave a basket, carve a Niuean cricket bat, and make a floral headpiece.

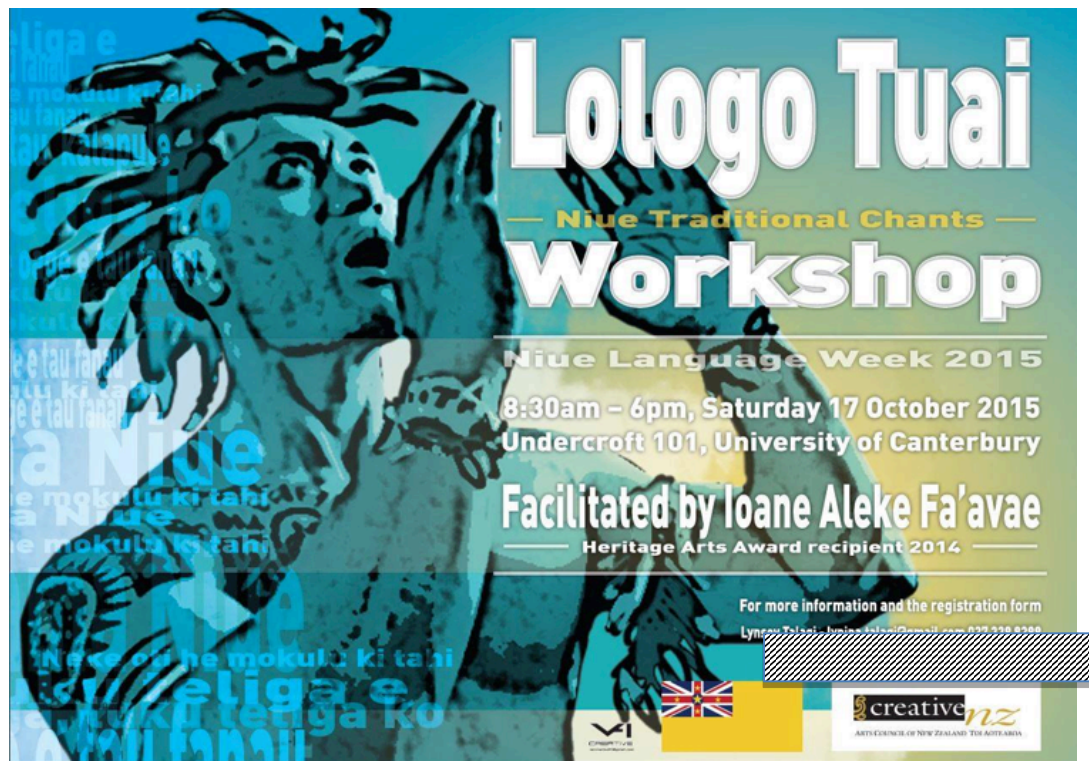


Figure 22 – Niuean Language Workshop Promotional Flyer



Figure 23 – Niuean Traditional Craft Workshop Promotional Flyer





Figure 24 – Niuean Tertiary Studies Information Night Promotional Flyer

I was also part of the planning and hosting of an empowerment workshop for the Niuean Youth conference, entitled 'Fuata Matala.' The name is a metaphor for the vision of Niuean youth of Auckland, of a flower blooming. It suggests a bright future and the ability of youth to reach their full potential. The day was broken up into seven mini-workshops, with a focus on careers counselling and education pathways in addition to the anticipated language and cultural identity focus. There was also a youth counsellor of Niuean heritage who encouraged the students to adopt a no-tolerance approach to bullying.

### Maintaining Niue in Auckland: Visibility, Education, and Futures

Overall, the organisers of Fuata Matala thought the conference was a success and were excited about the prospect of future events and workshops. In many ways,

Fuata Matala's careers and futures focus is reflective of the overall Ministry of Education's drive to lift achievement scores of Pacific and Maori students, in a bid to raise rates of university and tertiary qualifications among this demographic. In fact, it was the careers and education focus of the Fuata Matala conference that the organisers saw was lacking in the Niuean community rhetoric. This gap in messages communicated to the Niuean young people has led to the revisioning of these themes in a culturally relevant and community-building way. Organisers acknowledged the need for greater visibility amid the broader Pasifika community services agendas, feeling *invisible* when grouped in this way: "It's about being visible... it's about really feeling the urge to 'save Niue' by showing ourselves... it doesn't matter if I'm a quarter Niuean or whatever... it's that whole thing of making it visible before it disappears." one contact added: "If it's a Niuean one—we'll go!... Instead of 'it's a Pasifika one, nah, it's alright, all the Samoans and Tongans will be there—they'll take up all the room,'" she said in jest. Gaining 'visibility' amid greater Pasifika is an issue that Fuata Matala addressed by hosting a youth conference exclusively for Niueans.

Fuata Matala, Alyssa, and Jackson are passionate to see the vitality of the Niuean community, and actively promoted the engagement of Niue culture in day-to-day life in New Zealand. These individuals are but a few leaders in the community who have a vision for a deeper, stronger, and closer-knit Niuean community who promote high achievement in their Niuean students, and who want the best possible future for them. Wherever their future takes them, they want them to have strong sense of their Niuean history. The workshops are seen as a space where the 'passing on' of language and traditional knowledge can be achieved; a



moment in which the attendees can begin a deeper relationship with what it means to be Niuean and to build ties to Niuean heritage and homeland.

## Conclusion

Due to the collective burden to maintain and revitalise Niuean culture and identity, participants were asking how Niue's economic viability and livability could be maintained if it is left to die out. How would Niue's unique language and culture be kept alive if not for intentional intervention? Those Niueans who desire to maintain Niue culture and identity wish all Niueans to band together and build together. However, there is a growing number who have never been to Niue and are not actively engaging in the revitalisation and reproduction efforts. How secure is Niue's future if it is left to the hands of a nation (transnationally spread) who do not do something about it? Efforts in Auckland are as much about maintaining the physical place of Niue as much as the nostalgic symbolism of it. Preventing Niue from 'dying out' is being attempted through nation-making endeavours such as language classes, cultural arts workshops, and participation in Pan-Pacific cultural festivals.

Niueans in Niue are initiating nationalistic endeavours that seek to maintain Niue's *tāoga* in Niue, while drawing on the participation of Niueans residing in Auckland, and vice versa. Kai Niue, the Heritage Artist exchange, and the Niue Arts Festival are examples of such efforts for 'cultural bridging.' These efforts have an agenda to build a deeper sense of nationalistic pride and longings for 'home' in the diasporic community abroad. Similarly, in Auckland, language and the maintenance of cultural art forms were of great concern for the diasporic

communities, which has resulted in a growing engagement in language, weaving, and carving workshops, coupled with youth leadership and education goals.

My fieldwork schedule resulted in me being in Niue after my time in Auckland, which starkly contrasted my underlying assumption that ‘preservation’ agendas regarding language and traditional arts would be less visible in Niue. This was not the case. While the preservation of Niue was heavily wrapped up in the economic viability of the nation, the socio-cultural sustainability of the language and tradition was equally a concern. Furthermore, because Niue’s population is considerably small, transnational bridging has been seen as a necessity to secure and maintain both aspects of Niue’s future. This chapter has presented the transnational concerns Niueans have for the maintenance and reproduction of Niue. The chapters that focus on ethnographic examples of Niuean transnationalism and the difference of the digital: how digital media has supported, sustained, and facilitated Niue nation-making and Niueans’ transnational concern for the maintenance and revitalisation of Niue.

## **Chapter 5:** *Auckland; The Fifteenth Village*

*We came in 1954... My great aunt, who lived in Papatoe [short for full suburb name: Papatoetoe], she was one of the very first Niueans, and she'd been here for years before we came... first my uncles came and lived with her... and they set up their own place, and then we came and stayed with them... So as each family was established, other family members would come and they would help, but she was the first one... We came, like everybody else's reasons, they came here for a better education for their children... [My dad] swore that if he ever had children, that his children were educated.... But for someone who did not have any formal education, he did really well.*

*We came here when I was still very young. And mum did the same for others. They would come and live with us in Ponsonby, where a lot of the Pacific Islanders first settle when they came... so mum would have to find them jobs, and find them accommodation... so I think I've just learnt through her (her own passion to help others and do community work)... But mum was doing it (social work) without realising what she was doing... and now of course with all these other refugees coming into the country, they have orientation, and they get accommodation provided for them, and they get everything... And so every time we go to meetings, government agency meetings, we say the govt. owes us P.I. people a lot of money (laughs)... because we did all that for ourselves.*

- Aileen (late 60s, Niuean residing in Auckland)

## Introduction

The migration histories of the Niuean communities to Auckland are of course varied and personal, yet they are linked by common motivations, struggles, and striving for greater opportunities for future generations. As in Aileen's own personal narrative, for many Niueans who now live in Auckland, the move to New Zealand was enabled by the freedom to travel between Niue and New Zealand and a kinship-supported chain migration. Aileen is now in her late sixties, retired, and her children are now adults with children of their own. She shared with me the changes she has seen over the years, her regrets and mistakes, and her hopes for herself and her family's future. Aileen's and many others' experiences of migrating to New Zealand have shaped the socio-cultural landscape of the country, and in turn this has shaped the lived experiences of the Niueans interviewed in this fieldwork.

As Aileen explained to me, being Niuean in New Zealand created a dichotomy between being Niuean versus 'the other' (namely *palagi*, which is a term used for white New Zealanders), and a blend of the two. This was also discussed by several other participants in the form of formulaic equations, ethnic backgrounds and ancestry:

When I was born, [my aunt] was the one that suggested that I be called Aileen... 'Cause it was a *palagi* name... My grandfather wasn't gonna have that -- He was like, 'what is that name?... What does that even mean?'... Islanders, their names are combinations of names of family history and ancestry, so there's a significance to the meaning of your name... So my full name is a combination of

my two grandmother's names... But nobody knew me by that name, I was always Aileen...

Aileen spoke of why she was so passionate about teaching the Niue language and culture, and shared her regret that her grandchildren were not connected to their ancestral traditions and culture. She had worked two jobs to put food on the table when her children were growing up. Her children never learnt the language from her, and by extension they cannot hand down the language to their own children. This saddened her because she knew that once she passes away their link to her 'home' and ethnicity will be lost. She imagined that future generations would simply call themselves Kiwis rather than Niuean (or even Niuean-Kiwi), which she saw as negative and something to be dissatisfied about. It was this sense of loss and lack of legacy, of not perpetuating Niuean culture in a future generation, that motivated Aileen to work towards cultural promotion. However, for Aileen, cultural identity was more than titles and names. It was also the mundane and day-to-day things, like preparing a meal:

I guess as I've got older I'm a real stickler for doing things properly... when we had the lunch last week at the school... and I'm probably the oldest member there... and the others are all younger... and I baked some taro... and so I went to peel it... and one of our young staff members came along and just picked it up and chopped both ends of the taro... and I was like 'wait, hang on a minute - you can't do that... and I said to her - there's an art to peeling taro... so you don't waste half of what you should eat.'... cos we bake ours and then we peel it - and she goes 'oh' (imitating how she pulled away from the taro in response to Aileen's reprimand)... and the others were like "don't worry - you're not the only

one who has been told off for not peeling taro properly"... 'Cause it's expensive - it's \$4 a kilo... and all I could see was my taro half gone! (laughs). That's part of our culture, you know - knowing how to do these little things... So I was like right "all of yous, you need a lesson on how to peel taro' so you don't cut half the top off... and there's nothing left to eat" (laughs)... All those little things, you know!

Aileen felt compelled to prevent the loss of Niuean culture and identity, even in small ways, like teaching the younger generation how to prepare taro correctly.

This chapter provides the historical background to how Auckland became Niue's fifteenth village. In Chapter One I briefly discussed the political ties between Niue and New Zealand, particularly the association that gave Niueans ease of movement to New Zealand. This ease of mobility has meant that the majority who claim Niuean heritage actually live in Auckland. Thus Auckland can be seen as another 'site' of Niuean-ness, so much so that Niueans often playfully refer to Auckland as another 'village' of Niue. However, the perpetuation of Niuean culture is seen to be under threat, thus sparking a kind of activism towards saving Niue language and culture. This preservation agenda is an example of Schiller and Fouron's (2004) "nationalism from afar," a result of the desire for the creation of a "singularity of place" discussed by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) and Levitt and Schiller (2004). The dynamics at play shape the way Niueans are engaging with what it means to be Niuean, both in Niue and in New Zealand.

Niue is a compelling case to understand how the mediation of negotiations of culture and identity in digital spaces influences transnational lives. As I will

demonstrate, the case of Niuean digital transnationalism reveals how it has become a normalised and everyday practice. This chapter works to contextualise the political and structural influences on Niuean identity construction(s), and subsequent chapters build upon this foundation to investigate the influence of the digital. In this thesis, the question of how digital media are shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities is in essence an investigation of Niuean digital transnationalism. It provides a framework for understanding how digital media supports, extends, and transforms transnational practices relating to communication (and co-ordination), cultural revitalization, and social reproduction. Similarly, studying digital media practices exposes the layered 'units' that shape Niuean identity: nation, village, family, and self.

### Niuean 'Being' Vs. 'Belonging'

In describing the experience of transnationality, Levitt and Schiller (2004) distinguish ways of *being* versus ways of *belonging* to transnational social fields, and thus inform my analysis of narratives of being and belonging to the Niuean transnational social field. It refers to the social relations and networks an individual may be a part of. One may distinguish these social networks by certain common practices, attitudes, and ideas. Individuals can be embedded in a social field but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field. Because they live within a social field, they have the potential to act or identify with it at any particular time, though not all choose to do so. *Belonging*, as one research participant put it, is a sense that one may "*feel* Niuean," as opposed to one who may have Niuean heritage or "Niuean blood" but does not necessarily

engage with the activities, symbols, or attitudes attributed to the group's identity. Levitt and Schiller define "ways of being" as the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than the identities associated with their actions. In contrast, "ways of belonging" refers to practices that signal or enact identities, which demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group. For example, an individual may invest in, vote in, or belong to a religious community that links them to their country of origin, but he or she may not identify at all as belonging to a transnational group. The person is engaging in transnational ways of being but not transnational ways of belonging. Ways of belonging combine action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies, and a desire to be a part of that group.

Mau (2010) writes of *social transnationalism* as a concept through which to investigate the cross-border interactions that transform the day-to-day realities of individuals and social networks. A social transnationalism perspective, explores the interactions and mobility that extend physical and political borders. Individual and kinship networks are the focus for an investigation of how social transnationalism vacillates between large movements and flows. and more granular individual articulations. It is important to recognise that these flows may or may not be flowing in one direction, at the same speed, or at the same level as we would expect. Social transnationalism brings these flows and contraflows to the forefront. Mau, Levitt Schiller and Jaworski explain:

...the actual degree to which social networks and everyday activities have in fact transcended the political and geographic boundaries of the nation-state remains largely unknown. Social transnationalism is an attempt to address this unknown



by examining the formation and expansion of transnational social relationships and forms of cross-border mobility. (Mau, 2010: 2)

The assumption that people will live their lives in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms and in countries with impermeable national borders, is not a reflection of contemporary societies. Moreover, as Hau'ofa (1993) argues, it was never the case for the Pacific. In the twenty-first century, more and more people will belong to two or more societies at the same time. Transnational migrants may work, pray, and express their political interests in several geographical contexts rather than in a single nation-state. Some will put down roots in a host country, maintain strong homeland ties, and belong to religious and political movements that span the globe (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Portes, 1996; Vertovec, 2009). Transnational social fields contain institutions, organisations, and experiences that generate categories of identity that are ascribed to or chosen by individuals or groups.

## **History of Migration to New Zealand**

New Zealand is a country consisting two main islands situated in the south-western Pacific Ocean. The total population is approximately 4.5 million people, with about 1.3 million of those living in Auckland, the largest city. Wellington, the country's capital, has a population of around 200,000 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). New Zealand has a diverse and beautiful landscape that was made famous by recent movies such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia*. The residents of Auckland are a mix of different cultures and ethnicities, with a high concentration of Pacific Islanders living in South and West Auckland. This is in

contrast to a predominantly *pakeha* (Maori term for white European people) and Maori population in more rural areas. The high level of South Pacific migrant populations is due to several migration policies and New Zealand's geographic closeness to the South Pacific islands (Bedford, 1984). People from different Pacific islands migrated from the 1950s onwards and settled in New Zealand. Spoonley (2014) describes these migrant communities as now 'matured' and are largely made up of New-Zealand born, multi-racial individuals, who choose to remain transnationally linked to familial ties overseas. As a result, Niueans' lives in Auckland have been heavily influenced by the greater Pasifika and Māori migration histories.

The Māori were the first settlement of Polynesian people in New Zealand and are recognised as the indigenous people of New Zealand. Māori originated from settlements from eastern Polynesia and arrived via canoe at least 700 years ago (Bedford, 1984; Te Ara, \_\_\_\_). It was not until the late 1780s, after James Cook's voyages to the antipodes, that parts of New Zealand fell under the British rule and it was colonised. It was initially administrated within the region of 'New South Wales,' which included parts of Australia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. New Zealand and Australia separated and became self-governing colonies in 1841 (Fairburn-Dunlop and Makisi, 2003; Cook and Wharton, 1893; Cook et al., 2001). Christian missionaries settled in New Zealand in the early 1800s, and mass immigration increased from the 1840s onwards, primarily from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland<sup>11</sup>. However, the gold rush in the 1870s also brought a large

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11 Early European settlers purchased land from the Māori and began farming and maintaining trade stations. However, unrest due to misunderstandings over land ownership as well as general lawlessness amongst the European settlers prompted Britain to take a greater

number of Chinese men to the South Island goldfields. However, it was not until after the Second World War that large-scale migration from the Pacific began (Te Ara, \_\_\_; Fairburn-Dunlop and Makisi, 2003; Bedford, 1984; Anae, 2006).

## **Auckland: A New Home for Niue**

Dad came first 'cause of his family... my mum and the rest of the kids followed... because of the money-wise it was very expensive to come across. Father came here, save up for his wife and kids to come over. You had to catch a boat to Fiji and then catch a plane to New Zealand... but now that you can see that the transport is regular... there's no one in Niue.

The one's who are here really work hard to save up to bring their family over. Dad when he came, he began as a labourer for a year or two and then he became a bus driver... and ever since then he was a bus driver for the rest of his life... but his ambition was to become an electrician, but because an electrician required to go to a course for so many years... and on the course you don't get much money... so he had to work... drive for years to get the family by... Once you get here, it doesn't end... You gotta get housing and feed everybody... school everybody... yeah that the pressure's here.

Today our mum and dad's place is the hub for us meeting up... family functions... Christmas, New Years... everybody has a big family now... I got 3, my brothers got 5, my sister's got 5... I mean we don't see each other every week... We all got work and school...

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interest in governing this new land. This eventually led to the treaty of Waitangi, which formally conceded to the British crown, and changed land ownership from Māori to British, which is still a point of controversy today.

My parents are pretty involved in the Niue community, you know, right up until now, if you mention their name to any Niuean committee, then they would know who they are...

Functions and events... Hair cutting ceremonies... Church - Church events...

Family groups and get-togethers... funerals - that's the time you would catch up with all those you haven't seen in years and years and years... people travel from far and wide to be with their family in those times....

(George, late 60s, student services  
administrator, Niuean residing in Auckland)

George's and many others' migration stories have meant that today, Niuean culture is enacted both on Niue island itself, as well as among the Niuean community in New Zealand, which is a subset within the greater 'Pacific' population in New Zealand. Pacific Islanders in New Zealand are comprised of at least 13 distinct cultural groups. The many Pacific ethnicities are represented primarily by Samoan, Cook Islander, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, and Tokelauan groups, with smaller numbers from islands such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and the small island states of Micronesia. An estimate of New Zealand's ethnic make-up in 2006 articulated the breakdown between the different cultural groups:

Percentage within total population	Ethnicity
77%	New Zealander/European/other
15%	Māori
7%	Pacific
10%	Asian
1%	Middle Eastern/Latin American/African

Figure 25 – Population breakdown of New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2010)<sup>12</sup>

It is also estimated that at a natural growth rate of about 3.3%, by 2051 the Pacific population in New Zealand will grow to 599,000, taking it to 18.1% of New Zealand's population projections (Cook et al., 2001). This growth suggests the Pacific descent populous can be seen as an increasingly significant social and political element in New Zealand's society, especially in the urban centres such as Auckland and Wellington where the majority of Pacific peoples reside, go to school, go to work, shop, and contribute to the community. People who identify with Pacific ethnicity make up approximately 7% of the total population, and Niue is 7% of that 7%. As a result, Niueans in New Zealand were described as a 'minority within a minority' by the master of ceremonies at the launch of the book *Niuean Identity* in May 2012.

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<sup>12</sup> People who identify with more than one ethnicity are included in each ethnic population that they identify with.

Migration from Niue before World War II was largely for temporary employment opportunities on other islands. After World War II these migrations became increasingly permanent, and women and families became involved. Walsh and Trlin theorised that the most likely reason for their migration was the scarcity of resources in Niue. They sought greater opportunities in other lands, and their main destination was New Zealand (Walsh and Trlin, 1973: 48). The table below shows the number of Niueans in New Zealand between 1945 and 1966. This data is taken from the New Zealand Population Census from 1945-1966. Significantly, by 1966, 2846 Niueans were in New Zealand, which represented over half of the Niueans who resided in Niue at that time.

Year	Niuean population in NZ
1945	225
1956	848
1961	1,728
1966	2,846

**Figure 26 – Niuean Population in New Zealand (Walsh and Trlin, 1973: 48)**

As shown in Figure 26, according to Walsh and Trlin's study of Niue the combination of the policies that New Zealand implemented and the difficulties faced on the island are directly correlated with the rate at which the Niuean population had decreased. They also forecasted the continued migratory pattern: "Migration is understandable, given the local environment and the opportunity to migrate, which full New Zealand citizenship ensures. Given the strong sense of kinship responsibility, it is also understandable once kin are established in New Zealand that other kin will follow. A migration chain has been forged and is not easily broken" (Walsh and Trlin, 1973: 49). Today, due to a combination of natural population increases and further out migration from Niue, there are approximately 22,000 Niueans in Auckland,<sup>13</sup> more than 17 times the number of residents currently in Niue. However, as mentioned earlier, this number is only a small percentage of the 'Pacific Islander' group within New Zealand.

Due to historical and socioeconomic factors, in Auckland Pacific and Maori people are stigmatised as poor and uneducated, and often partaking in gang-related activities. Today there are a number of public policies and charitable trust organisations that aim to help drive up education levels and the socioeconomic statistics of Pacific and Maori young people, and ensure equitable employment and business opportunities through mentoring and empowerment programs. Closing the 'achievement gap' between Pasifika and other (Pakeha) students has been a key focus for the Ministry of Education for many years. In 2001, the then-Government's plan for education resulted in the Pasifika

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13 According to the 2006 NZ Census there were 17,667 Niueans in New Zealand

Education Plan (PEP), which underpinned the Government's goals for Pasifika education (Meaola Amituanai-Tolosa et al., 2009). Similarly, there are any tertiary scholarships allocated specifically for students of Maori and Pacific descent<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, the Pacific Island and Māori communities within New Zealand are over-represented in lower income brackets and unemployment statistics. In March of 2008, 76 percent of Pacific peoples<sup>15</sup> were employed in either semi-skilled or low-skilled occupations compared to 70 percent for Māori<sup>16</sup>. Only 15 percent of Pacific workers are in high-skill occupations compared to 19 percent of Māori and the overall average of 30 percent. The key issues facing Maori and Pacific peoples in New Zealand include having less financial wealth, and being under-represented in leadership and governance roles due mainly to lower rates of tertiary study. These factors impact negatively upon their upward mobility. As a result of these statistics, there are a number of government and NGO initiatives to help combat these problems, as well as increased engagement in social welfare and community development initiatives. Advocacy and cultural maintenance efforts in and for the Niuean community are nestled within this greater socio-political environment.

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14 During my fieldwork in Auckland, I attended a tertiary information night for Niuean students who want to continue onto university studies. This night involved several tertiary institutions represented, giving information on their school offerings, including information about scholarships specifically allocated for Pasifika students, and one school specifically allocating \$5,000 for Niueans.

15 Although the statistics do not explicitly outline the percentage who were Niuean, it would include some Niueans. This also speaks to the social perception of Pacific Islanders as disadvantaged and of lower socio-economic status, and the claims that Niueans are a 'minority within a minority'.

16 Labour Market Statistics, year ending March 2008, Statistics New Zealand. High-skill occupations are defined as Legislators, administrators and managers and professionals.



## The Maori Renaissance: a Model for Niue Advocacy

The Maori Renaissance is the social movement that aims to raise the profile of Maori affairs and their cultural 'place' in New Zealand. Aesthetically, their campaigns are made visible through public signboards posted both in English and Maori, especially in government or public service institutions, libraries, and university grounds, as well as places such as museums and art galleries. In addition, many logos and marketing graphics for businesses and organisations included Maori-influenced patterns and imagery. The importance place that the Maori people and culture are viewed as having in New Zealand is seen in the integration of Maori language, symbology, sculpture, and architecture in the city-scape and urban topography of Auckland. Similarly, as Rosenblatt (2011) puts it: "New Zealand could appear to the casual visitor (or even to its white citizens) as a basically British country and one that somehow managed its colonial conquest so as to leave no lasting scars or issues. But in the 1990s, such Illusions would no longer be possible on the part of either visitors or citizens" (p. 413). This was signified in the 'national consciousness' when Maori became an official language (alongside English) of New Zealand in 1987, and the recognition of Maori interests is also seen in greater partnership initiatives in education, welfare, and health.

Rosenblatt's research articulates the relationship between Maori place-making and identity construction in Auckland, which is done in deliberate and conscious assertions of building *marae* in the 80s and 90s. Marae are community ceremonial meeting places given a high degree of respect and honour for Maori people, in a manner that is similar to a temple or church:

These efforts are the beginning of what grew into a social and political movement—the Maori Renaissance—that aimed not only to find a place for Maori culture within urban life but also to change New Zealand from an antipodean Albion in which *some people*—mostly Maori—were bicultural into a *country* that was bicultural (Rosenblatt, 2011: 413).

Maori identity was a deliberate construction and played out in the active participation of communities that were built in and around these *marae*, differing degrees by Maori, part-Maori, and non-Maori alike.

This renaissance not only comprised of building urban *marae*, but also included increased funding for cultural dance groups, Maori schools, language and customs classes, Maori radio and television, as well as an explosion of publications such as books and magazines by and about Maori, and more Maori representation in politics. Sissons (1995) refers to the Maori renaissance and the birth of a bicultural New Zealand as underpinning multi-culturalism in New Zealand. A speech given by the Race Relations Conciliator in 1982 proposed that a “New Zealand national identity must be based on a firm foundation through which multi-culturalism can emerge.” Sisson takes a historical perspective to highlight that the push for Maori political and economic inclusion has led to the emergence of a new range of activist organisations. These organisations focus on new forms of participatory-democracy to ensure inclusion, not assimilation. The Maori Renaissance and the growing community of Pacific Islanders has produced the highly visible influence of Pacific Islander and Maori aesthetic and general

appreciation of Pacific and Maori affairs among national politics and media channels in New Zealand. This Maori renaissance and the rise of advocacy aimed at lifting the socio-economic statistics of Maori and Pacific people has had a dramatic impact on the nation overall.

Maori advocacy groups remain influential in policy decisions, such as in education and social service payments. Their approach has also influenced the Niuean communities in Auckland who also advocate for social support finance. Macpherson (2006) highlights the tendency of New Zealand policy to be informed by ethnic profiling rather than social class, and describes the tendency to group Pacific nations together in social statistics and by consolidating data to represent social and economic characteristics. Referring to the Pacific Progress Report commissioned by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs in 2002, Macpherson states that the “analytical approach focuses on comparisons of measures of central tendency of the two ‘populations’ [Pacific people versus non Pacific people] to establish the trajectory of Pacific Peoples’ social and economic progress” (Macpherson, 2006: 144). When critiquing this approach of grouping results by ethnicity rather than looking at class first, Macpherson explains that in New Zealand many people are used to explaining social differentiation in ethnic terms, whereas discussions of the nature and the consequences of ‘class’ differences tend to be sidelined in popular discourse.

Understanding the migration story of Pacific people to New Zealand, and post-migration developments and the maturation of these communities, is a major component of understanding the Niue transnational social field in Auckland. The

following section of this chapter focuses on the ways in which Niueans in Auckland are engaging in ethnic identity negotiation, reproduction, and co-construction.

### **Transnational Identities: Being Full, Half, Quarter-cultural**

Being a New Zealand born Samoan/Niuean... If I was to go to Niue or Samoa they think I'm a New Zealander, but here I'm a Pacific Islander - you know?... I'm not a New Zealander... There's a real interesting identity thing, growing up... And then when you go to places like the states... I'd say I'm a New Zealander, but... BUT, I'm a Samoan-Niuean... (laughs)... it's complicated.

(Toa, late 30s, Pastor, Samoan-Niuean resident of Auckland)

My parents came here in the 50s - I was born in the 60s.

And my life was here... I've been back to Niue, 5 or 6 times.

I love it back home... If I could work back home, I would... But my parents are old and retired... I think my dad wanted to go back in the 90s, but my mum wouldn't go... But now my dad's in a nursing home - so mum wants to go now, but they both wanted to go at different times... So, I don't know... My parents will most likely die here... I've been here (Auckland) a long time, but I still consider myself Niuean... If anyone asks me - 'I'm Niuean'...

(Alyssa, early 40s, Community Liaison, Niuean resident of Auckland)

For Niueans living in Auckland, cultural heritage is an important part of their construction(s) of identity. When my respondents answered questions about who they are, and where they come from, they saw large parts of themselves through what they called 'culture.' Findings from my fieldwork suggest that

research participants have constructed their own interpretations and definitions of culture and its effects upon them. It is seen as highly valuable and in danger of dying out. There are several reasons respondents cited a perceived threat. One participant, Toa, mentioned that, “one is a kind of invisibility amongst the greater Pasifika community in Auckland.” Niueans are but a small percentage of the greater ‘Pacific Islander’ transnational populations– a minority within a minority.

Vaka, a man who had only recently been to Niue for the first time, discussed his experience and the significance of how it was tied to his father’s own longings for ‘home’:

He wants to take us back and show us the land that we have, so we can take out kids and so their kids can take their kids... you know?...

He said that if he goes, then we miss out, and our kids miss out... And our future misses out... It’s really important to him to do that before he dies.

And it’s extremely important to me too... my other siblings have never been there... we hold a Niue name, but the majority have never been... there’s nine of us in our family and only two of us have gone to Niue.

Vaka revealed that he was half Niuean and half Maori, and had grown up with both cultures. He was actively learning the Maori language during the time of our conversations, and hoped to also learn Niuean too one day.

Research participants described 'culture' as their collective way of living, thinking, and imagining. They share a common language, history, and geography, which are expressed in customs, traditions, and rituals. Differences in such customs and traditions are more evident when these groups of people are living side-by-side in multicultural cities such as Auckland. These themes have also been explored in previous studies of the demography of Auckland (Gilroy et al., 2014; Tousignant Gauthier, 2013; Ross, 2014; George and Rodriguez, 2009; Johnston et al., 2002; Pearson and Ongley, 1996; Doerr, 2008). For participants in this research study, 'culture' has also, by extension come to mean 'ethnicity.' These concepts of culture and ethnicity are what these interlocutors continually raised during my time with them. The people interviewed described their concepts of culture as both a static picture from "back in the days" as well as a fluid and evolutionary product that is subject to time and place, development, and modernity. These participants distinguished Niue and 'Kiwi' culture as distinct and mutually exclusive, yet several participants also described the impacts of the western influence in Niue, as well as the striking differences they see between Niueans born and raised in New Zealand and those who grew up on the island.

Significantly, many of the participants in this study acknowledge multiple ethnicities, as a phenomenon that has been found by other researchers (Gilroy et al., 2014; Tousignant Gauthier, 2013; Ross, 2014; George and Rodriguez, 2009; Johnston et al., 2002; Pearson and Ongley, 1996; Doerr, 2008). It was common for the people I interviewed and interacted with in participant observation settings to refer to themselves in the form of a fraction, i.e. 'I am *half* Samoan and

*half* Tongan, or I'm *quarter* Maori, or *full* Niuean.' Jonathan, a young university student, reflects this fractionisation of how one identifies oneself when he described himself as 'technically, half Samoan, and half Niuean,' but Jonathan made it clear that despite this he actually sees himself as 'a full Niuean, who grew up in New Zealand.' He told me how his parents identified with being Niuean more than Samoan, which is why Jonathan claims full Niuean-ness today. Jonathan explained that his mother and father were both half Samoan and Niuean, which meant that one grandparent on his mother's side and one grandparent from his father's side were from Samoa. Jonathan felt the need to include '*technically*' in his description to also acknowledge his Samoan heritage, but because his parents were raised in Niue, spoke Niue, and live Niue lifestyles, they were, and by extension *he* was, thus 'full Niuean.' Jonathan also grew up going to a Niuean church and family functions to celebrate birthdays and/or cultural rituals, which cemented the Niuean culture in his identity.

Bradatan, Popan, and Melton (2010) suggest that any social identity, transnational or otherwise is not fixed forever; they vary over time as people change. It can be argued that living in one country for a long time usually increases an immigrant's connections with the host country and undermines their emotional ties with their community of origin. This is the very thing Niueans are trying to prevent in their nationalistic revitalisation and preservation efforts. They attempt to strengthen their identification with 'home' to ensure the future of the Niuean language, culture, and tradition. From this perspective, the Niuean elders and first generation migrants are petitioning the second and third generation migrants to identify with their parents'

communities, because for them 'home' was always Auckland, not Niue. The quarter Niuean, or second-generation New Zealand-born Niueans' relationship with Niue is often superficial, not going beyond the simple break-down of ethnicity and explanation of why they are not simply a New Zealander.

Albert introduces himself as Niuean-Samoan: "I'm Niuean-Samoan... My mother is actually Samoan-Tongan, but I don't really acknowledge that... and my Dad is Samoan-Niuean". I ask why he said he doesn't acknowledge his Tongan part. In reflection of this, Albert said: "I think it's 'cause it's so miniscule (laughs)... because, I mean, in terms of blood... if you could cut it up into fractions... It's mainly Samoan-Niuean... even my mother... I think she's like 1/8<sup>th</sup> so I would be like 1/16<sup>th</sup> Tongan... so you know?... But there's also, German, and all these 'random' ethnicities, so I primarily focus on Samoan-Niuean". Albert confesses that he has had to process what this break-up of different ethnicities mean to him:

It didn't matter when I was a kid... But coming to terms with my culture (or cultural mix) ... I think that the older I get -- the more mature that I got, I was able to be more rooted in who I actually am -- culturally... So I am Samoan. I am Niuean... but I'm New Zealand born Samoan-Niuean... But there was a lot of denial growing up, before the settling on who I was... I think it was when I 'found who I was' -- well not really 'found'... but when I kinda took all the masks off and what was left was: 'my name is Albert; I am Samoan-Niuean'... that's kinda what it was... I think it was my last year of high school... yeah, I'm not half Chinese... I'm not quarter Irish or whatever (laughs).



Albert refers to the German colonisation and the large Chinese and Irish migrant populations who are part of Samoa's history, which have resulted in many Samoans having German and or Chinese ethnicity. Albert noted that the colour of his skin and his learning about his family history have been implicated in the ways he has come to understand that he is more than just a 'Kiwi':

The colour of my skin is a big give-away ... [Also,] my parents told me... my grandparents told me... But a lot of it was through me asking... I asked my grandfather... But also, I've been really privileged to go these places with my family - I went to Samoa and our family, all together, kinda learnt about the history of our family. Where we come from... our blood-line... and I was also able to go to Niue, and we did the same thing as well.

The way Albert views himself today has 'settled' on "*New Zealand-born Samoan-Niuean*," but to come to this description his identity has gone through a sifting and experimentation process.

This sense of place and identity also became apparent when talking with Natasha, a woman in her mid-thirties who grew up in New Zealand since she was a small child. She was embarrassed to be asked any questions about Niue because she felt she should be more familiar with her language and culture. Natasha had not visited Niue since she left as a baby; she did not know much about the culture and history of Niue, nor was she familiar with the language. She felt she could not contribute to my research in any way. What Natasha didn't realise was that her hesitation was an important contribution. My interaction

with Natasha began an investigation into the constructions of Niuean cultural identity and how this was being expressed in Auckland. Although I did not conduct a quantitative survey, several of my respondents agreed that Natasha represents a large proportion of the New Zealander-Niueans who feel disconnected from their Niue heritage. Several of my respondents claim that Natasha's example can be further protracted in the generation of New Zealand born Niueans with parents like Natasha, who do not have the language skills or cultural knowledge to pass down to their children. This dynamic is also influenced by the many mixed-race marriages and partnerships that reflect the multi-cultural society of Auckland. They highlight some tensions that were expressed by my participants; namely, the fear of the extinction of the Niue language and culture.

However, I also met Niueans who grew up in New Zealand and who state that, while they were previously ambivalent about their Niue heritage, they have now 'connected with their roots' and are very proud to be *tama Niue* (a child of Niue). One such example is an older woman, Martha, who grew up in Auckland, but had not gone back to the island until she was in her mid thirties. Martha represents those who have had a 'return and re-connection' experience and now have a rich appreciation of being *tama Niue*. She explained that her visit to Niue was "a huge culture shock for her at first," and that she wanted to go home "A.S.A.P," but by the end of her trip she had "fallen in love with the island and culture." She has gone back and forth many times since, and is heavily involved in the Niuean community in Auckland.

Martha is on the board of several charitable trusts and community organisations, some of which are focused on the Niue community in Auckland. The events and gatherings of these organisations are often opportunities to celebrate cultural identity and promote unity and pride, and collaborate with Niueans in Niue. An example of these collaborations are the sports competitions that involve teams of young people from the Niue community in Auckland, incorporating teams from Niue island. Other variants of this are involvement in cross-cultural competitions such as Pacific touch tournaments, in which teams representing Samoa, Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands, and so on would compete. These trans-national but ethnically demarcated competitions aim to foster youth leadership, sportsmanship, and community spirit, as well as a place to instil other values, such as a respect for heritage, language, and culture (ones own and others').

## Conclusion

In this thesis, transnationalism and cultural identity are seen as fluid and complex aspects of identity, allegiance, and nationalism. They are performative in daily decisions and are a way of filtering the world around them. Concepts like 'nation' and 'ethnic identity' are investigated in this study and encapsulated in a broad overarching term: transnationalism. Smith (1991) defines 'nation' in the context of transnationalism as a political and cultural community that involves sharing myths and memories. Such a community has a historically well-defined homeland. Similarly, transnational identity, and in particular Niuean transnational identity, is rooted in imaginations of 'home,' which is considered to be the starting point *before* one migrated. This nationalism is thus extended to *transnationalism* through processes of migration and the formation of diasporic

communities. Furthermore, Smith (1991) defines national identity as being based on “common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions”. Smith further defines an “ethnic model” of nation that particularly focuses on nation as a “community of common descent” with people being related through birth/blood (Smith, 1991: 11).

Both attributes of Smith’s definitions of “nation” have been demonstrated through the ethnographic examples given in this chapter. The concept of Niue pride and the practice of nationalistic activities in Auckland reflect how Niueans in Auckland are doing their part in keeping Niue, the homeland, ‘alive.’ Portes et al. (1999) define transnationalism as a “social phenomenon” in which immigrants live and work in one country, but simultaneously have cross-border businesses (at ‘home’) and participate in ethnic social events such as music festivals. However, studies indicate that this is not a broad brushstroke to colour all migrant experiences (Basch, Schiller-Glick, & Szaton-Blanc, 1994; Cohen, 2011; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; H. Lee, 2009; H. M. Lee, 2008; Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Mau, 2010; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Pries, 1999; Schiller, 1999). Furthermore, only a small number of migrants actually get involved in cross-border entrepreneurship, and perhaps most only have loose contact with their homeland. However, these studies also indicate that transnationalism is a considerable force in maintaining relational and kinship ties, and indeed, plays a more significant role than political engagement.

In conclusion, ease of mobility has meant that the majority of those who claim Niuean heritage are actually living in Auckland. Niueans both on island and

abroad feel the burden to maintain Niue. Although not all cultural reproduction and nation-making activities occur online, Niue is a compelling case study to understand how the mediation of negotiations of culture and identity in digital spaces has become a normalised practice of Niueans' lives. The idea of digital transnationalism provides a framework to understand how digital media are supporting, extending, and transforming transnational practices relating to communication (and co-ordination), cultural revitalisation, and social reproduction. Similarly, studying digital media practices in these contexts help us to understand the motivations behind these transnational practices, such as people's motivations for undertaking communication and co-ordination, as well as cultural revitalisation and reproduction.

These negotiations of self and group identity then become a distinctive aspect of Niuean sociality, which in turn feeds into a broad suite of performative displays of identity and culture; that is, performative practice of digital transnationalism. This chapter gave context to the transnational constructions of Niuean identity and culture in Auckland, and the particular ways that Niueans in Auckland problematise their identities by using ethnic 'make-up' and honouring their 'roots'. Similarly, the multi-cultural and bi-cultural precedence of Maori identity politics has shaped a certain framework for Niueans in Auckland to assert ethno-centric social advocacy and stir up ethnic pride among the diasporic communities. In the next chapter I present an in-depth example of Niuean digital transnationalism in the context of a cultural dance festival held in Auckland. Though a powerful agent of identity and culture in itself, the remediation of the

event via Facebook, Instagram and YouTube becomes a digital media event for the Niuean transnational social field.

## Chapter 6: Polyfest: Niuean Nation-making in Auckland



Figure 27 – Niue Stage at Polyfest 2015

*“Polyfest – Polyfest is the only way I’ve ever connected with my Niuean side,”*  
confessed David, another young Pacific Islander in Auckland. *“I believe*  
*that that’s where most people are able to connect with their Niuean culture.*  
*It’s the only real time you can see it...”*

- David (21, ¼ Niuean residing in Auckland)

This conversation with David revealed that he too identifies himself as another ‘fractioned’ Niuean who was born and raised in New Zealand. Like Jonathan (in Chapter Five), David “cling[s] more to [his] Samoan side” and does not really acknowledge his Niuean ancestry. He rationalised this decision also with a fractional formula of his ethnic make-up. He explained that his mother was half Niuean, which he works out to make him only a ‘quarter’: “I failed maths... so what's half of half?” he quips.

Jonathan explained that because he grew up in South Auckland, where he was surrounded by many Pacific Islander people, he had developed more of the ‘Samoan side,’ especially as the majority of his classmates were Samoan. David also explained that he felt that it was more acceptable to be ‘Samoan’ than ‘Niuean’ in Manukau—so much so that he even denied having any claim to Niue. As a result, this stunted his exploration and acceptance of his Niuean heritage. Despite this, David still knew that he was part Niuean, and realised that he would only really connect with this through the Niuean performances at Polyfest.

## Introduction

Polyfest is first an important symbolic event for the Niuean transnational social field, and is used as a tool for a kind of ‘nationalism from afar’ (Schiller and Fouron, 2001). It is a means to teach and reinforce cultural identity within the Niuean transnational social field; very significant, especially for a recent



generation who have inherited a homeland from their grandparents, yet never set foot. Polyfest is seen as a meaningful event in a Niuean's journey from *being* to *belonging*.

I first experienced Polyfest as an asynchronous digital media event. Due to the timing of my arrival in Auckland, I did not experience Polyfest first-hand during fieldwork in 2014. However, I was able to view sections of it on catch-up TV (televised on Fresh, on New Zealand's TV2 channel, the TV programme focusing on Pacific communities in New Zealand), as well as through amateur videography from members of the audience. I enjoyed watching the performances, albeit on my laptop, from my lounge room. Although the Niuean community in Auckland is small, I was impressed at the size of the Niuean teams, and that there were enough students for several schools to compete against each other. I later discovered however that the Niuean teams were not fully comprised of Niueans. The majority of the students in the teams did not have Niuean ancestry. Drawing on concepts of the *media event*, in this chapter I show how the meaning-making power of Polyfest can be mediated through channels such as television, radio, and now digital media, becoming a *digital media event* for Niueans. Digital media create and extend a refracted participation of the actual event, and create an opportunity for the co-construction of these meanings. Polyfest as a digital media event is therefore a key component of Niuean digital transnationalism.

Polyfest is a major aspect of Niuean culture and identity in Auckland, and is also transnationally connected to Niueans in Niue. Polyfest is an example of how

symbolisms, media, ritual, and identity intersect and how they become significant for the Niuean community in Auckland. To further frame my analysis, I draw from other ethnographic and anthropological works on rituals and performance by authors such as Kaeppler (2002); Couldry (2003); Geertz (1973). These theoretical themes highlight the ways that dance rituals and performing arts have been used to carry and convey social values and history, and often a form of time-keeping. I also have drawn from Dayan and Katz (1994) and Couldry's (2003) work in the field of media studies and their conceptions of media events and media rituals. I also draw upon the concept of mediated meaning-making to argue that Polyfest has become a digital media event within Niuean digital transnationalism.

I argue that Polyfest, which is a cultural performing arts festival, is a significant place of ritualistic and symbolic representation of 'self' and 'nation' for Niueans. It is a key component of the overriding 'preservation' agenda and desire for the maintenance of Niuean culture and identity. Of which, is also being experienced in new ways due to digital media. Therefore, this chapter first depicts Polyfest as an event of cultural maintenance and then demonstrates the difference that 'the digital' has made. I ask what Polyfest means to respondents, providing an understanding of how Niuean cultural identity is constructed and negotiated. I highlight the significance of the remediation, amplification and refraction and of these meanings in and through digital media.

## What is Polyfest?

ASB (Auckland Savings Bank) Polyfest, is Auckland's secondary school's cultural festival. It showcases cultural song, speech, costume, and dance, and is an important display of New Zealand's cultural diversity, as well as being a positive influence in the lives of the youth who participate (ASB Polyfest, 2014). Each year, the festival is held over four days in March, at the Manukau Sports Bowl in Auckland. Over the last 40 years it has grown into an iconic annual event that celebrates the Maori and Pacific communities, and is a major contributor in shaping the 'Pacific Island' identity in New Zealand, providing a public platform for each distinctive people group to express their cultural individuality.

When Polyfest commenced in 1976, there were four schools involved and they showcased *Kapa Haka* (Maori performing arts) and Pasifika cultural items. Each year a different school hosted the event. As word spread and its popularity grew, however, it has become too large for any one school to host. The event was moved to a large arena-style facilities. In 1996 Polyfest became an independent organisational entity forming a not-for profit trust, which allowed them to receive corporate and government funding. In 2015, there were over 9000 students competing from over 50 schools. Students compete by cultural group and by school. Each performance is an average of twenty minutes and is judged by several categories.



Figure 28 – 2015 ASB Polyfest Promotional Flyer

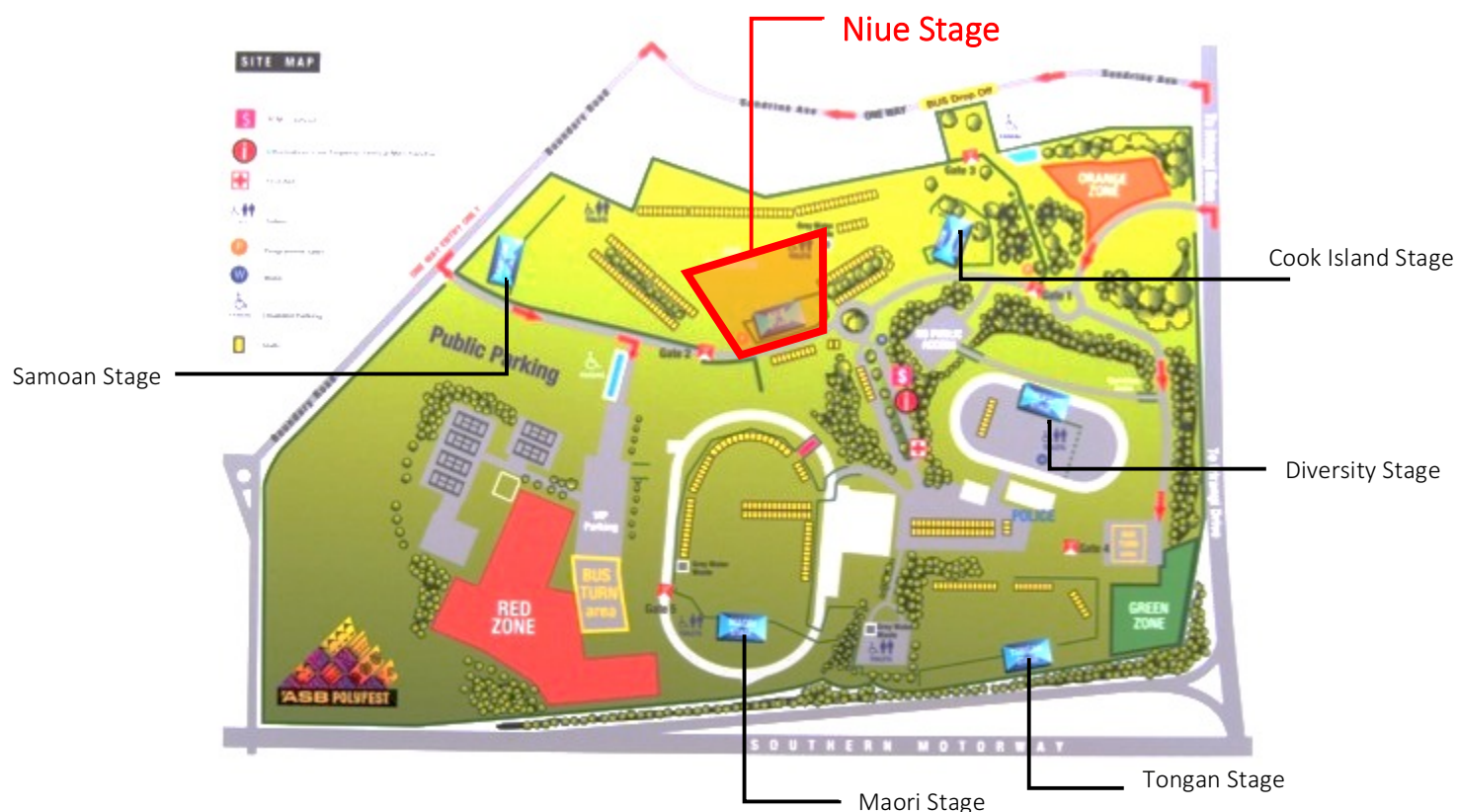


Figure 29 - 2015 Polyfest Site Map, hosted at Manukau Sports Bowl, Auckland

I was intrigued by the fluid hand movements of the Tongan dances, the demure postures of the Samoan dances, and the energy of the Niuean *takalo*. Travis, one of these non-Niueans representing Niue in Polyfest for his school, told me that his motivation for being involved was that he was proud to “help out” the Niue team, because he knew there weren’t that many Niueans in his school. He is of Samoan descent and very engaged with his own cultural heritage, but shared how he had enjoyed learning about Niue, and eagerly described the differences

he saw between the two. Even from these early stages of my research it was very apparent that my participants saw Polyfest as a significant aspect of Niuean culture and identity.

In 2015, more than 50 schools competed across the Maori, Niue, and Samoan stages, showcasing traditional cultural dance, costume, and song. Larger schools had a group competing on each stage. A recent addition, the 'diversity stage,' hosts a mixture of cultural performances including Fijian, Chinese, Korean, and Indian ones. The Niue stage showcased 16 schools and judged them according to 16 categories based around costumes, choreography, story telling and musicology. This was a relatively small number, considering that some of the larger ethnic groups hosted more than three times as many groups. Several students also participated in a speech competition in which they recited prose in *Vagahau Niue* (the Niue vernacular). In recent years, the New Zealand-Niue Teachers' Association, in collaboration with the New Zealand Vagahau Niue Trust, has placed emphasis on speech to encourage students to participate in public speaking and to provide an opportunity and incentive to use the Niue language.





**MANUKAU  
INSTITUTE OF  
TECHNOLOGY**  
For Whānau, Tāhuhu, & Whānau

**MIT Niue Stage 2015  
Performance Schedule**

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

PERFORMANCE TIME	SCHOOL
9:00 – 9:00am	
9:30 – 10:00am	Onehunga High School
10:00–10:30am	Southern Cross Campus
10:30–11:30am	Waitakere College
11:30–12:00pm	BREAK
12:00–12:30pm	Manurewa High School
12:30–1:30pm	Papatoetoe High School
1:30–2:00pm	LUNCH
2:00–2:30pm	Aorere College
	Tairāhuna College

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015**

PERFORMANCE TIME	SCHOOL
9:00–9:30am	Henderson High School
9:30–10:00am	James Cook High School
10:00–10:30am	Massey High School
10:30–11:00am	BREAK
11:00–11:30am	Otahuhu College
11:30–12:00pm	Mangere College
12:00–12:30pm	Auckland Girls' Grammar School
12:30–1:30pm	LUNCH
1:30–2:00pm	Edgewater College
2:00–2:30pm	Avondale College
2:30–3:00pm	Alfriston College
4:00pm	PRIZE GIVING

Figure 30 - Polyfest 2015 - Niue Stage line-up, posted backstage

## Mediating Meaning - 'Media Events' and 'Media Rituals'

In addition to being a locally-experienced event in Auckland, Polyfest is also a digital media event and ritual that circulates through the Niuean transnational social field. The theoretical themes of 'rituals,' 'media events,' and 'media rituals' are a starting point to examine the ways in which digital media is extending, perpetuating, and co-constructing these social phenomenon. They are important in understanding the power of Polyfest as a mediation tool in itself: how its messages are being mediated and re-mediated through traditional and new media practices, establishing and reinforcing constructions of Niuean identity.

Dayan and Katz (1994) state that what they have termed 'media event' could alternatively be called 'television ceremonies,' 'festive television,' or even 'cultural performances' to refer to a distinct genre of television content. A media event is an invitation to a ceremonial television space, which is normally televising a large public event in sub-categories of 'contests,' 'conquests,' and 'coronations'. These could be events such as the Olympic Games, the journey of Anwar el-Sadat to Jerusalem, or the funeral of John F. Kennedy (Dayan and Katz, 1994: 1). Media events as a category of study includes any large-scale interruption of regular television programming, providing a national or worldwide opportunity for shared experience. Media events are live broadcasts of large-scale events or ceremonies that often monopolise content on all competing channels, and which "celebrate what, on the whole are establishment initiatives that therefore unquestionably *hegemonic*. They are proclaimed "*historic*" (Dayan and Katz, 1994: 8), and allow viewers to participate in the celebrations, receiving perhaps a momentary sense of community, albeit around their television sets:



The power of these events lies, first of all, in the rare realisation of the full potential of electronic media technology. Students of media effects know that at most times and places this potential of radio and television is restricted by society... In principle, radio and television are capable of reaching everybody simultaneously and directly; their message, in other words can be total, immediate, and unmediated. But this condition hardly ever obtains. Messages are multiple; audiences are selective; social networks intervene; diffusion takes time. On the occasion of media events, however, these intervening mechanisms are suspended. Interpersonal networks and diffusion processes are active before and after the event, mobilizing attention to the event and fostering intense hermeneutic activity over its interpretation. But during the liminal moments, totality and simultaneity are unbound; organizers and broadcasters resonate together; competing channels merge into one; viewers present themselves at the same time and in every place. All eyes are fixed on the ceremonial center, through which each nuclear cell is connected to all the rest. Social integration of the highest order is thus achieved via mass communication... Thus, the media have the power not only to insert messages into social networks but to create the networks themselves – to atomize, to integrate, or otherwise to design social structure – at least momentarily. We have seen that media events may create their own constituencies...

(Dayan and Katz, 1994: 15-16)

In addition, using the anthropological themes of *rituals* (Couldry, 2003; Couldry et al., 2010; Katz et al., 1998) and *pilgrimages*, Couldry encourages the reader to look through a wider-angled lens to investigate how “the social world is ‘mediated’ through a media system that has very particular power-effects, and

how the actions and beliefs of all of us are caught up in this process” (Couldry, 2007: 2), using the term ‘media rituals’ to capture certain aspects of this phenomenon. He likens the mediated message delivery of television to the way similar messages were delivered in traditional cultural rituals and ceremonies: “*Media rituals* are any actions organised around key media related categories and boundaries, whose performance reinforces, indeed helps legitimate, the underlying ‘value’ expressed in the idea the media is our access point to our social centre” (Couldry, 2003: 2). Drawing from Rothenbuhler (1998), Couldry highlights how family traditions like weddings and funerals, state ceremonies, and media events mark socially important occasions. They emphasise how rituals and regular celebrations play a role in building and constructing a sense of community.

However, an analysis of Polyfest should focus equally on the ritual itself as well as its media manifestations. Kaeppler observes, “Unlike [traditional concepts of] ritual, in which the formal acts and utterances need not be encoded by the performer, theatrical acts and utterances [such as those constructed for the Pacific Arts Festival and Polyfest] are encoded” (Kaeppler, 2002: 11). There is deliberate choice-making, foregrounding, and backgrounding of themes and messages that is considered and calculated. Although many of the art forms exhibited at Polyfest and the Pacific Arts Festival have ritualistic pasts, Kaeppler argues that the origins of chants and dances performed are removed from their original place in society, and the primary ritual is now the participation in the cultural festival itself. These themes are significant for understanding how

Polyfest mediates an experience of history and heritage, and forges a future relationship with participants' cultural identity.

Krotz's (2010) conceptualization of media events provides examples of using media to sway public opinion, particularly in the way the media portrayed the re-unification of East and West Germany in 1990. Dayan and Katz (1994) emphasise the point where a real-world event becomes a media event: it is in the decision for the media to treat it with a special focus, with reverence and ceremony. However, Krotz proposes an alternative definition of a media event, one that emphasises the narratives, values, and orientations that are decisively articulated: "A media event with a specific narrative which gives the event its sense and meaning... to give people a collective orientation as to what is good and bad and how they should get involved" (Krotz, 2010: 110). Similarly, the power of Polyfest to influence Niuean culture and identity emanates from the narrative surrounding the planning, rehearsal, and performance of the pieces. This is then further extended through remediated constructions, deconstructions, and meaning-making via hashtagged commentary and nationalistic social media posts.

Eisenlohr (2015) also provides an example of how media can enable an event to transgress time and space. Although focusing on time and chronotopes, Eisenlohr writes about the ritual and pilgrimage practices of diasporic Hindu in Mauritius, as well as the contemporary mediation of the rituals of Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai. Both these seemingly disparate experiences bend time and space to 'transport' people to the events of Karbala in 680 AD, or to the Ganges River in

India. The significance of the ritual in 'current time' is only fostered by the significance of links to the past, with the pilgrimages and recitation of ritual facilitating a mediation of ideas on heritage and history. An added layer is the ways in which the ritual itself is then re-mediated through the broadcast of sound and picture, and how this can create a sense of belonging. These kinds of emotional connections allow further constructions of both group and personal identity. Like the Shi'ite in India and the Hindu in Mauritius rituals, for Niueans in Auckland Polyfest has become a method of mediating a connection to another time and place—a historical and future-focused re-imagining of Niue. This is also the case for the other Pacific Island nations who participate. Is there also a sense of Pacific Islands unity in this event, a sense of common rituals and experiences?

Couldry (2003) and Pink, Horst, Postill et. al (2015) also describe how traditional media and newer computer-mediated Internet interactions provide ways of imagining ourselves as connected to the social world, especially through more 'specialised' and selective media channels. This highlights the decentering of power from a unified and authoritative hegemonic message to a more diffused and socially constructed consensus. Dyan and Katz's model of 'digital media events' shows how digital media has the power to insert messages into social networks. Digital and social media also embraces the selectivity and choice of the audience and facilitates the creation of 'a moment of shared significance' for a particular group or cause. This is most visible when 'traction' is gained and a snow-ball effect leads to posts that 'trend,' or when an individual sees a collective theme in the posts in their news feed.

## Niuean Ritual and Identity in the Arts

Historically, dance and music travelled with Polynesian explorers and traders as an intrinsic part of who they were and how they constructed community.

Polynesian music and dance are traditionally linked to ritual and religion, especially seasonal or agricultural rituals, life-stage rituals, and those directed at worship: “In many Pacific Island societies, movement/sound sequences that originated in rituals performed in sacred spaces (or temples) were transformed from religious work' into 'music' and dance.' Many of these music/dance pieces have been preserved as cultural treasures, and sometimes presented as art and as cultural and ethnic identity markers” (Kaepler, 2002: 8).

Much of the historical, anthropological, and missionary accounts of Pacific Island life describe the frequent performance of song and dance, as well as the oratory nature of the communication of social memory and time-keeping in these rituals (Kaepler, 2002; Couldry, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Moyle, 1991; Otto, 2005; Pulekula, 1903; Ellis, 1961). Other dances were used to display strength and power in order to ward off impending attacks from invaders.

Visual and auditory compositions often communicate social values in an artistic form. Turner and Geertz suggest that an anthropological approach to performance and theatre must be grounded in the study of symbols, experience, and play (Turner, 1982; Geertz, 1973). Dance movements and songs work together, forming a poem or story about the chosen subject or topic of investigation. Polyfest provides a platform for peoples who are now living away for their homeland to connect with their cultures through traditional group

dances and song performances. However, the competitive environment is a modern development.

Each culture has their 'signature move' or steps that are unique to them; for example, the Maori have the *pūkana*, which are exaggerated facial expressions, often involving widening the eyes and sticking out of the tongue. The Samoans use a lot of hand slaps and claps to create rhythm and interest between slower movements. The Cook Islanders are known for the fast shaking of the hips, and the Tongans have the 'fakateki,' punctuating movements of a small but swift side-tilt of the head. The similarities and differences between the Polynesian groups are particularly apparent in rhythm, movement, and music styles; however, these expressions of Pacific society and culture do not escape change and modern interpretation, especially in such a competitive environment. It is also evident that contemporary dance styles and musical influences have been integrated into performances of these traditional cultural arts. Hip-hop moves and acrobatic flips have been introduced to all the stages, although they are primarily only exhibited in the 'contemporary' category. A Niuean example is the modernisation of a traditional move, the *hopo*. The *hopo* is a typical move in Niue dances involving hopping from one foot to the other. It which punctuates different sections and motifs in the overall dance, and is traditionally done facing the front. Twisting to the side is a modern insertion, adding visual flair to the presentation.

Niuean performing arts are marked by group singing and/or chanting, either by a separate group of musicians, the dancers themselves, or a combination of both.

Since Niue was settled by Samoans, Tongans, and Cook Islanders, Niue performing arts is influenced by these cultures. However, Niue evolved its own distinct language and traditions, and these are also reflected in their song and dance. Legend has it that due to the lack of room on the canoes of early settlers, they could not carry large instruments such as drums, and this resulted in early song and dance pieces in the new settlement being restricted to chanting and body percussion such as clapping, slapping, and stomping of the feet. As time went on there was a re-integration of drums and other dance movements. The *takalo*, a popular Niuean dance, is known for its dynamism, male bravado and vicious snarling. It reflects past territorial wars in which these dances were used in the endeavour to ward off unwanted intruders. At the Niue Polyfest stage the *takalo* is a favourite item performed by the students and rouses the largest cheers from the audience.

Polyfest provides a space for the maintenance and display of the Niuean performing arts. It is a contemporary space linking history and tradition. These traditional dances and rituals are what respondents wish to 'keep alive' and 'pass down' to the next generation. They feel they are key aspects of the Niuean culture and identity. Although dance styles have changed over time, the Polyfest Tutors felt it was important to stay true to tradition, while allowing room for modern and contemporary influences. Those who participate in Polyfest value the maintenance of the performances, understanding that the art form works to mediate historical and cultural meaning.

## The Festivalisation of Identity and Regional Place Making

A point of comparison, and a major influence in the creation of Polyfest, is the Pacific Arts Festival that started in the early 1970s. Lewis-Harris (1994) states that the sixth Pacific Art Festival held in the Cook Islands in 1992 could aptly be subtitled the *Pacific Islands Cultural Identity Festival*. He/she examines the rhetoric surrounding the promotion of the festival and quotes the opening and closing speeches, which all intentionally articulate how the festival has become a space to define each ethnic group's identity;

The Cook Islands Government seemed to have taken the cultural identity theme to heart while planning the festival activities and agenda. The opening ceremony address by the Cook Islands Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Henry (1993), was an excellent example of this underlying theme. Throughout his speech he stressed the importance of maintaining Pacific Islander identity and life style through cultural values and customs...Our cultural heritage is not a nicety; it is a necessity...To have command of ourselves and our future, we must know who we are.

(Lewis-Harris, 1994: 10)

The Pacific Arts Festival (PAF) commenced in 1972 and is held every four years. It is recognised as a major international cultural event and is hosted in a different country each time. The PAF is the largest gathering of Pacific peoples, and there are currently 27 participating countries. The SPC created the festival in an attempt to combat the erosion of traditional customary practices. This is reflected in the subtitle of the first festival held in Fiji: *"Fight against the disappearance of traditional arts in most Pacific countries. Protect them from*



*being submerged by other cultural influences. Start a process of preservation and development of the various local arts forms” (SPC, --).* The theme of cultural survival and the maintenance of traditional customs and practices were a major theme from the beginning, and according to Lewis-Harris, equally explicit in the sixth festival. The festival aims to offer a venue to keep traditional arts ‘alive’ and educate the younger generation about them, in order to ensure their perpetuation and long-term maintenance. Another goal is for all participants to learn to appreciate their neighbours’ cultural practices and to facilitate cultural exchange between the participants. The festival also allows the general public to increase their awareness and understanding of the indigenous cultures of the Pacific.

Kaeppler describes the festival as a venue for ‘rituals of identity’ for Pacific communities, especially in the midst of globalisation, and suggests that this event is the most important venue for the visual and performing arts in the Pacific: “Patrons, presenters, performers, and beholders support the Festivals for a variety of reasons, but one of the most important is the emphasis of the Festival as a vehicle for Pacific identity in the modern world” (2002: 5). Drawing on Kaeppler’s attendance at six festivals, he/she explores how presenters, composers/choreographers, performers and audiences convey ideas about a collective past, present, and future in and through the performances, arguing that the Pacific Festival can “offer Pacific answers to regional identity – unity within diversity” (ibid.: 5). The festivals mediate the message of a harmonious regional and individual identity.

Kaeppler and Lewis-Harris perceive the festival model as a strong medium for the dissemination of the 'Pacific Way.' The 1976 South Pacific Festival of Arts was hosted in New Zealand and coincided with the inaugural secondary school Polynesian and Maori dance show-case, Polyfest. A lasting legacy was the inception of *Te Matatini*, the high-profile national *kapa haka* festival. From 1988 onwards, seminars and meetings were incorporated and aimed at distancing the indigenous populations from colonisers, thereby affording them more political agency. Similarly, Kaeppler suggests that, as a result of the politicisation of the Pacific Arts Festival, there was a growth in a personal sense of pride in Pacific Island culture and traditions, and many became cultural activists in their communities. The Pacific Arts Festival is a template for Polyfest, and both run side by side with similar aims. Both are examples of the growing influence of the festivalisation of identity and regional place-making, which is further translated into the digital media event and digital media practice to 'cover' and 'document' the festivals.

### **Polyfest: A Transnational Rite of Passage**

Polyfest is of importance in the construction of Pasifika culture and identity in Auckland, and despite David's limited appreciation of his Niuean heritage he still desires to connect with his 'Niuean side' through Polyfest. As I was unable to attend the festival during my initial round of fieldwork in 2014, I returned to Auckland the following year to focus on it. In March of 2015 I conducted further fieldwork, 'following' the Niue groups at three schools in Auckland. I also took advantage of an 'all-access' pass to the 'Niue Stage.'

While following the three school groups, I observed several rehearsals during which the students learnt the themes and stories of their pieces. I then watched the final performances and participated in the debriefing celebrations. Alongside these times of participant observation, I conducted formal interviews with the tutors, several of the students, and people involved in the planning and co-ordination of the event. I was focused on the ways that Polyfest provides a platform for the display and deliberate construction(s) of Niuean culture and identity in Auckland, rendering it a sort of nationalism and a 'claims making' and community construction tool for the Niuean diasporic community. This helped me to explore the question, *'how are digital media shaping the negotiation and construction(s) of Niuean identities?'*



Figure 31 - Rehearsals after school; learning symbols, stories and syntax

On the first day of rehearsals, Judy shared how she was both nervous and excited as she was about to meet the new group of students she would be tutoring for Polyfest that year. Judy and her cousin, Chris, had spent a couple of months composing and choreographing in preparation and were ready to start working with the students towards the final performance on the stage. Over the six weeks that followed, the students would learn and master lyrics, posture, poses, and actions. They were to learn the symbology of their actions, and the traditions, myths, and legends behind the lyrics. Chris described his own experience at Polyfest more than ten years ago as a “rite of passage” because it was a significant time in his adolescence for understanding ‘who’ he was. He also said that participating in Polyfest was a time in his life that sparked a deep sense of pride for his Niuean culture, as well as stronger respect for other cultures within his community. This was his motivation for participating in Polyfest as a tutor.

Similarly, when discussing the reason Charles, a gentleman in his mid-forties with two young children, chose to help tutor for Polyfest. He explained:

...to teach the younger generation about the culture... And to appreciate their culture and their roots... especially those with a Niuean background but born here... and hopefully they can go back and actually see Niue, and really appreciate where Niue is and what it's like and stuff. Seeing the kids with a willingness and interest to learn... teaching them, and seeing them engaged and interested is quite special... hopefully they'll use that (the passion and interest to learn) in the future.

When I asked what they would be missing out on having been born and raised in Niue, he replied with a smile;

When you wake up, you see the coconut tree outside your window... you see the sea, you can go to the bush and plant taro, and over here you just buy it from the shop. You have hands-on experience - practical experience with the land...

Charles described the things he loved about Niue, what he felt those who grew up in Auckland were missing out on, and why it is necessary for the young people growing up in Auckland to learn about who they are and where they come from.

### **Polyfest: A Transnational Reinforcer of Kinship Ties**

This section highlights the importance of Polyfest to the Niuean transnational social field. Polyfest works to reinforce the kinship ties of the transnational social field in of Niueans in Auckland and back 'home'. For example, Judy reflected on how much Polyfest was a community effort in which family and friends came together to not only help write, choreograph, and teach the students, but also to help with the design and making of the costumes, collectively dedicating over a hundred hours of rehearsal time. Her participation was entirely voluntary, and carried out on top of normal study schedule and workload. Polyfest was such a family affair, despite the fact that several of Judy's relatives were tutoring other Niuean school groups throughout Auckland, meaning that they were technically competing against each other.

The commitment of volunteers is evident in the fact that as early as the closing remarks from the last year's Polyfest, Anita began to think about what they could do in the next year. It would be the fourth year in a row that she would be tutoring for Polyfest. She already had ideas for a new song to compose, and she knew her niece was going participate that year, so she had all the more incentive to "make it good." Anita's mother and grandmother had been part of Polyfest for many years; in fact, a number of her aunts and uncles performed when they themselves were in school, and several had also



**Figure 32 - Backstage preparations; photos, pep-talks and group prayer**

become tutors in their older age. Indeed, Anita's own uncle had tutored her group more than six years ago. When I asked her about her preparation for this

year, she was struck by the generational impact of Polyfest for her family, exclaiming what an honour it was to be able to 'pass on the baton' to her niece. Anita grew up in Auckland and worked in a full-time job as an administrator for a charitable agency. She was both excited and dreading Polyfest because of the amount of time and effort it was going to take. But she shared how she believed it was all worth it, stating that she had come to that conclusion every year. She knows how proud she will be of the students, and imagines how much they will have learnt and grown as a part of the whole process. After all, she can recall how much she herself learned in her time competing in Polyfest.

### **Polyfest: A Time of Cultural Construction**

As mentioned in previous chapters, Niueans consider the perpetuation of their culture to be under threat. Another aspect of this 'loss' or 'diminished' sense of Niuean culture became apparent in my pre-interview interactions with Niueans. Many who may have Niuean heritage, yet do not necessarily identify themselves to belong to the label of 'Niuean,' refused to be interviewed. They declined because they did not believe they had anything to offer this study. I was mostly referred to people who are active in the Niuean community, and who actively promoted the engagement of Niue culture in day-to-day life in New Zealand. These people were generally leaders in the community, and they had a vision for a deeper, stronger, and closer-knit Niuean community in Auckland. Some of these leaders were also teachers who promoted high achievement in their Niuean students.

As a result of the perceived threat of cultural loss, respondents said that for Niueans Polyfest cannot be just a competition. Although they no longer live in Niue, the Niuean peoples living in Auckland felt a responsibility to do their part in promoting and preserving their heritage. The festival was seen as a platform and a medium to preserve their culture and traditions. One aspect of the way Polyfest contributes to this 'preservation' is of course through the dances, but it also facilitates the perpetuation of the language. According to Te Ara, the online encyclopaedia of New Zealand, as of 2013 only 18% of all Niueans living in New Zealand could speak their language proficiently. In 1996 the number was 32%. By contrast, more than 60% of Samoan and Tongan New Zealanders were able to hold a conversation in their own language. Polyfest is seen to be one way to achieve the preservation of their language, culture, and identity. Although this preservation is a concern for all of the transnational Pacific Island communities in Auckland, Niue is one of the smallest of these communities and therefore Niueans feel that their efforts are more necessary than those for larger groups, such as Tongans and Samoans, whose language is not in danger of dying out.

Niuean culture and identity in the multi-cultural landscape of Auckland was overpowered by the larger groups and was at risk of being lost among them. Travis, the Samoan in the Niue dance troupe, recognises this and explained to me, "...you have Niue, who are a minority. They don't have much to learn from... (I asked him to explain further) – they don't have much people around them to teach them... All they can do is copy other cultures because that's who they hang out with." Furthermore, the Niue stage generally has fewer teams competing compared to the other groups, which is why Travis wanted to participate with



them rather than in the Samoan contingent. Travis saw a need to champion the 'under-dog' and help lift the Niue stage profile in Polyfest. He desired his Niuean 'brothers' and 'sisters' to have as much cultural identity as he felt he did as a Samoan.

For Anita, introduced earlier in the chapter, Polyfest is more than a talent show, or even a showcase of the diversity of culture in Auckland. She described it as part of who she is and how she approaches life. However, Anita and Judy are perhaps extreme examples and not necessarily representative of the majority of participants, for not everyone who participates in Polyfest will have had it 'run in the family,' nor will they become a tutor later in life. But for Anita and Judy, that was the way they had experienced and continued to experience Polyfest. Chris explained how he loved playing music and enjoyed the opportunity to use his talent towards the 'rite of passage' experience for other students: this is his main motivation for continuing to do what he does. Each of these young adults see Polyfest as an active agent in constructing Niuean culture and identity in Auckland.

### **Polyfest: A Transnational Space to Create 'Home'**

When asked what Polyfest meant to them, respondents made it clear that Polyfest held a greater significance than simply being a 'showcase' or even an extracurricular activity for school credits. Genesis, a student participating in Polyfest, took a few moments to think about her response, and replied:

Polyfest would be when islander families come together and bring all traditions back... and spending the days *as an islander*... Watching, performing, eating - it's really good for our Pacific Islander community to come together as one... bringing everyone together... you have people from west Auckland and central, coming to watch everyone in South Auckland... Join in and being a part of Polyfest.

Genesis is a young woman who described herself as “half-Niuean.” Her dad is Niuean and her other ‘half’ is made up of a Maori and European blend. She said she had always been interested in her cultural heritage(s), as her family taught her about her ‘roots.’ She went to a Niuean language nest (Niuean early childhood centre) as a child, and her Niuean grandmother often spoke to her in Niuean. She conceded that she only knew a few Niuean and Maori words and phrases, but was not fluent in either. Genesis added, “we try to speak Maori and Niuean at home so we can try and learn it - but mostly English.”

Stephan is a young man in the Niuean group of a rival school. He said of Polyfest:

Polyfest to me is a fun opportunity for all types of cultures to come together, collaborate, learn different aspects of each other’s culture is like... learn what kind of cultural things they get up to in their area of sharing and expressing themselves... And I think it's such a good thing because everyone can learn off anyone's dance - it's optional - you can go to Samoan, you can go to Cook Island, Tongan... it can be any culture - Indian, Spanish - anything you want.

Stephan was very animated when he described the cultural diversity of Auckland and the option of learning about other cultures. He eagerly pointed out that although it was common for the young people to participate in Polyfest, they sometime chose to participate in groups from another Pacific island culture: “I recently saw a Korean girl lead Epsom Girls [Grammar School] last year – the Tongan group. It was just mind blowing seeing that happen... She did really well.” In sharing that example, he explained that some Niueans have gone to the Samoan group. He emphasised the significance in his own choice to participate in the Niuean group when he could have easily chosen Samoan, Cook Islander, or Tongan.

Stephan had participated in Polyfest a couple of years in a row, and enjoyed the social aspects of the experience. For him, Polyfest was a statement about cultural identity, but it was also fun. He enjoys all forms of dance and feels he has gained confidence in overall public speaking and performing for an audience. On the other hand, the fun and comradery of the Polyfest process has been an avenue for Stephen to learn more about the Niuean culture and language, allowing him to also feel more confident to ‘claim’ that he is Niuean:

Performing in Polyfest makes me quite teary actually, ‘cause I love my culture - and this is what I do - this is why I do it for - for my culture - to represent myself and my people... and show what I've been taught - how I can express myself - and show it on the stage - keep my cultural side close.

Stephan shared how he didn't know very much about Niue growing up in Auckland. Though he knew a few words, he could not understand the language fluently, and didn't know much about its history or cultural practices. Stephan describes his participation in Polyfest as the starting point for his current passion for his culture.

At the Niue stage, I approached a small group of young people in the audience. My seemingly simple question, "What is Polyfest?" broke into a lively discussion about the deeper meaning and greater significance of the festival:

Audience 1a: It's a cultural experience - a gathering together of different cultures

It's so the Maori and Polynesia can express their culture. And we can learn about other people's cultures... There's performances, people, food, and they're representing their school.

Audience 1b: I did it, about two years ago - I loved performing - it's an adrenaline

rush. [I think it's important] 'cause it shows off each culture - you get to represent the diversity of the city... And I think this [Manukau] is the epicentre of Pasifika, Maori... It's pretty good to have it out here (referring to holding the event in South Auckland).

Audience 1c: Because cultures can bring out their traditional stuff, and perform...

keep your culture alive so that you know where you come from... So that you always have a part of it in your heart - even when you're not in the islands.

I asked why they thought these things were important;

Audience 1a: 'Cause some people tend to lose their culture - they forget where they come from and stuff...

Audience 1b: Yeah, 'cause some people just tend to go to other cultures and think they're another culture, but they're not... You should know your roots - where you've come from and how you're brought up and stuff...

What you do as a tradition... 'Cause if you get married or have birthdays and stuff you have to do traditional stuff... so it's easier for them if they're already familiar with the culture... if they've done Polyfest and stuff, they'll have a good idea of what to do...

This group of young people articulated the ways they experienced Polyfest and conceptualise 'culture' in contrast to an apparent lack of cultural knowledge and experience. As discussed in the previous chapters, having 'culture' as opposed to none is a dichotomy often described as being New Zealander versus Islander or Maori. Similarly, Genesis described Polyfest as a place to spend the day '*as an islander*,' as opposed to not really living as an islander while outside of this space. The bringing together of people and community to showcase dance, costume, language, and song 'from the islands' is how these young people are beginning to negotiate what it means to be 'cultural.' For David, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, although he felt more Samoan, he has found Polyfest to be a place where he can connect to his Niuean side. He himself performed in the Samoan group when he was in school.

Theresa, a young woman helping to tutor a Niuean group, gave her perspective:

[Polyfest] is a time where students come together and embrace one another – everything culture. This is a time for me to learn more, or something new about my culture, and learn about another culture. How they dance... How they perform... You actually *learn more* about your culture. I know for little kids; they have culture days like this – but it's not as extensive compared to the secondary school's Polyfest – 'cause you can do more with your culture (as a teenager) than you can do at a younger age.

Theresa felt that Polyfest was an environment in which participants could gain a deeper understanding of Niuean culture and a time when cultural identity becomes more important to the individual, as opposed to the lesser exposure to formal cultural learning as a younger child. In adolescence, Theresa felt the students could be more reflexive and experimental. Polyfest was an opportunity to internalise what 'being Niuean' means to them and exercise their interest in their culture and identity.

Theresa shared how she wants to spark a passion for the Niue culture that she felt was sparked in her when she was younger. Her hunger to know more was something she felt others should have, and was trying to capture before it is too late:

I'm trying to get as much from my Nanna, before she passes on... My mum has taught me so much about the Niue culture, but my nanna knows more than what my mum does... My nanna showed my mum how to make a *takihi* (Niuean

pawpaw and taro dish), my mum has passed it on to me... But I still believe she would know more than my mum... My mum doesn't even know how to make a *pitako* (Niuean arrow-root bread)... Nanna please show me how to make *pitako*... so I'm trying to get as much of the Niue culture – songs, traditional village hymns... The arts and crafts!... I'm still getting my head around how they do it... *They just know*... That's crazy!... ... there's no written instructions... it's from years of experience... they just sit there.... There's a pattern and stars... she just 'did it' ... I was amazed.

Theresa feels a responsibility to learn as much as she can about her Niuean heritage, and pass it on to the younger generation. She saw Polyfest as both a starting point and a place to deepen her understanding and spark a desire to learn more.

### **Polyfest in Digital Media and Identity Co-Constructions**

Because of the high concentration of Pacific Island diaspora in New Zealand, there is also a strong Pacific representation in national media and music. There are television programs catering to the Maori and Pasifika (collective term used to refer to the different Pacific Island ethnicities) audiences with programs such as *Tangata Pasifika*, *Fresh TV*, and a recent online initiative: *thecoconet.tv*. Figure 33 shows a screen shot of the Tagata Pasifika webpage, a Pasifika focused current affairs programme. Figure 34 is a screenshot of the TVNZ Fresh TV webpage. This is a programme that targets young Pasifika people, focusing on creative arts, cartoons, and music videos. Maori- and Pacific-targeted radio

programming is also readily accessible, including broadcasts that originate from the islands and which are listened to on radios in New Zealand.

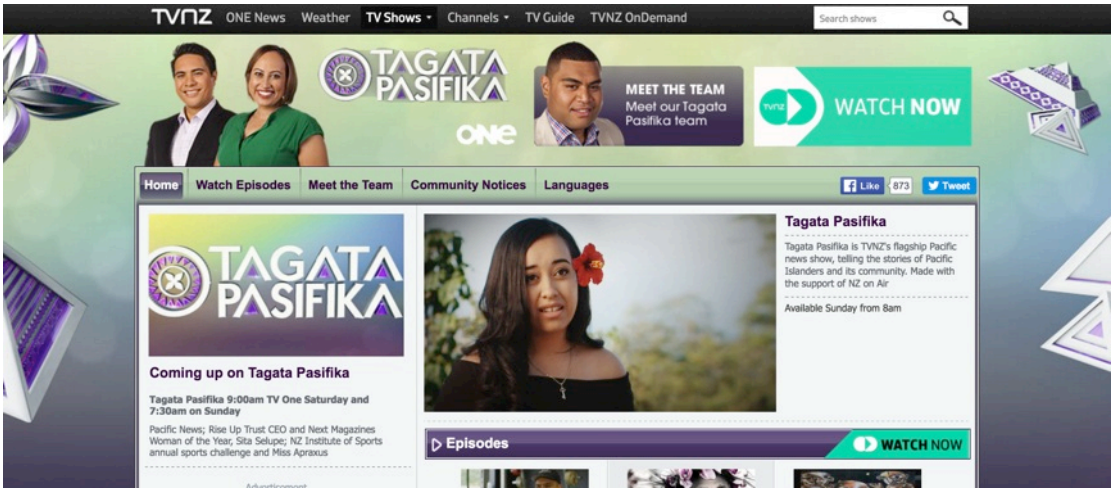


Figure 33 - Screenshot of the TVNZ Tagata Pasifika web-page

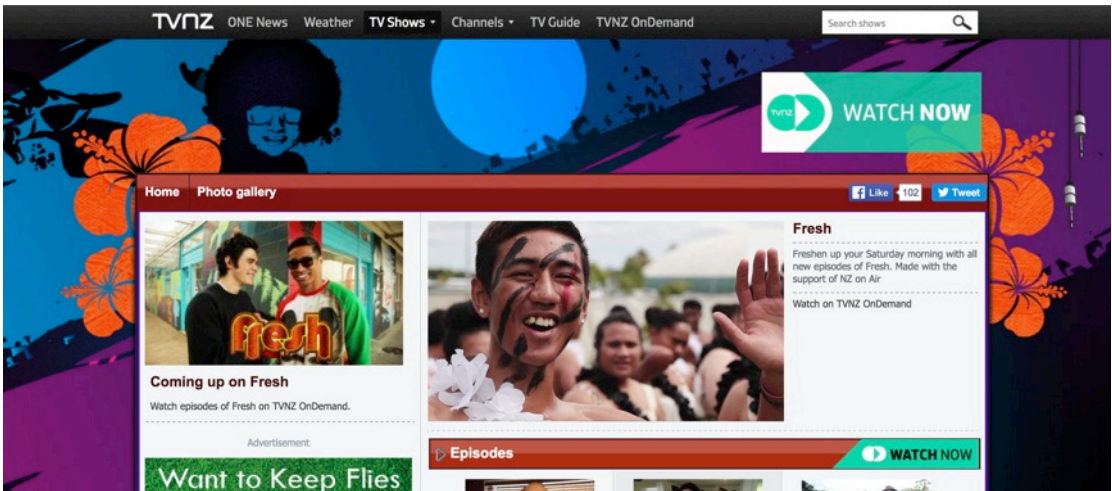


Figure 34 - Screenshot of the TVNZ Fresh TV web-page





Figure 35 - Screenshot of the CocoNetTV web-page

Polyfest is a platform that Niueans use to make statements about their culture and identity. This platform is extended beyond those physically present, as Polyfest was 'covered' by both mainstream and Pasifika media channels, as well as through social media. Social media has become a digital platform through which experiences of Polyfest are remediated. This digital media event provides a way to co-construct what it means to be Niuean. Social media extended and amplified the co-constructions of what it means to be Niuean. Individuals have the opportunity co-construct this nationalistic message along-side traditional media voices, remediate and commentate on nationalistic themes, and are shaping the definition of what it is to be Niuean.

Nisa, an older woman in the Niuean community in Auckland, seemed to echo Kaeppler's observations of the Pacific Arts Festival when discussing the one closer to home:

In my own words, Polyfest is a representation of one's culture through dance - The amazing thing about Polyfest I suppose, is when kids' - it's probably the only time they come to learn a little bit about where they're from, or where their parents are from... A lot of our kids are NZ born of course, so Polyfest is a chance to network - You see more Niuean people in the one place.... You hear, see and feel 'being Niuean', although it's only a short time in the year - but for most people - it's when they feel Niuean the most...

Nisa saw Polyfest as a chance to connect with her community and learn something more about her culture, or in some cases to learn about other cultures. She supposed that the significance of this was “humongous,” especially considering it may be the only time a young person has the opportunity to learn about their Niuean heritage: “You know, be it just a little bit - at least you get to learn about the dance - you hear Niuean being spoken...” Nisa conceded that Polyfest was not ‘enough’ to comprehensively learn the language and culture, but that at least it was a start:

Some Niuean kids have never set foot in Niue - they don't know anything about Niue... But they acknowledge it a lot more now... When you see the takalo being performed, and the fire and passion on the stage - all of a sudden you're really proud to be Niuean... The takalo comes from Niue... we are more proud now, than before... A lot more outspoken then before... and way more 'out there' than we have been in the past... Polyfest can only be a good thing. It's another platform to showcase our amazing culture

Similarly, when speaking with other members of the Niuean community in Auckland, it was apparent that they saw Polyfest as carrying out two things: the greater appreciation of the Niuean people in Auckland, and providing the impetus for a deeper passion for cultural heritage among the younger generation. Nisa became quite emotional when talking about the impact Polyfest has on the Niuean community. She was fighting back tears as she discussed her love for her country, her people, and her community. Polyfest is another initiative Niueans are using to stir a 'return and re-connection' experience and cultivate a rich appreciation of 'home' and being *tama Niue*.

Nisa mentioned the popularity of the Niuean *takalo* among young people and how it has enabled more of the Niuean youth to be more vocal and open about their cultural heritage. This, she said, has translated into an interest to learn more about Niuean history, cultural traditions, and language. Several respondents discussed the positive effects that digital media has had in extending the 'reach' of these kinds of cultural maintenance activities. Digital media allow those who cannot attend Polyfest in person to engage with the event professional footage such as that provided by *Fresh TV*, as well as amateur videography and photos shot by those in the audience. This extended the Polyfest 'encounter' with the Niuean *takalo* to beyond the physical limitations of Polyfest. The upswell of 'Niue pride' that Nisa referred to was fostered by an increase in the visibility of Niue culture and tradition in Auckland. This has also been supported with the 'flood' of Polyfest related posts on social media, such as '#polyfest2015'. Krotz (2010) states that the co-presence created through the mediation of cultural rituals allows the extension of time and place, and the

opportunity for individuals to 'connect' to moments and spaces they could not be in physically.

Although Polyfest may not be thought of as a 'media event' in the strictest form as Dayan and Katz initially conceived, if analysed from through lens it becomes apparent that Polyfest has the potential to shape a group consciousness and identity through the dissemination of a particular message. While it is not practiced on a national scale, nor broadcast live, it is significant within the Niuean transnational community. When conceptualised as digital media event it is evident that Polyfest's 'power' is amplified. Its reach extends as a space for 'ritual' and 'pilgrimage' impacts on the Niuean communities in both Auckland and Niue. Due to the nature of digital media, Polyfest is actually also a digital media event for the Niuean transnational social field. The remediatory and asynchronous quality that digital media enables may be more significant in resignifying media events. Because a digital media event can be asynchronous and even remediated through the recent Facebook function of sharing 'memories', they can have a longer life-span and theoretically a greater and more significant 'reach.'



Figure 36 - Radio interview being conducted with a tutor



Figure 37 - Amateur videography Vs Official Film crew for *Fresh TV*





Figure 38 - Still and moving images being taken by individuals in the audience



Figure 39 - A 'selfie' in progress – taken back-stage, before the performance

Chris referred to the process of participating in Polyfest as a kind of 'rite of passage' in the Niuean transnational social field, with ritualistic significance at all levels of engagement, whether as a tutor, student, live audience member, or an observer/ participator via digital media. Polyfest has significant cultural meaning for Niueans who are highly engaged with their cultural identity. Yet it is also a space for those who are not so engaged with the transnational social field since they can 'belong,' even for the few moments during which they view performances at Polyfest. Experiences of the event are remediated through traditional and social media, naturally crossing national borders along the same lines as relational networks. Polyfest is filmed and televised (although not live), and Facebook is used by both individuals and organisations to promote the event, build excitement, and provide 'live' coverage through tweets and Facebook posts. Individuals' commentary, congratulations, and commiserations are posted on social networking sites. Still and moving pictures are tagged #polyfest2015 or #niuepride and other variations, which draws friends and followers to comment, 'like,' and 'share.' See images of screen shots in Figure 40.

Following Polyfest on digital media, I reviewed and took fieldnotes on mentions of Polyfest on Facebook and Twitter. The screen shots in Figure 40 are of the top results from Facebook and Twitter. The imagery is vibrant, with smiles and cheerful countenances. If text is included in addition to photos, the content is predominantly celebrating and congratulating friends or family, and the culture and school they are representing.



Facebook search of #polyfest2015 – Screen shot captured in September 2015



Twitter search of 'polyfest, niue' – Screen shot captured in September 2015

Figure 40 – Screenshots of Facebook and Twitter 'coverage' of Polyfest

Based on the dates of publication, the images in Figure 40 were taken and loaded on the day of performances during the four-day festival in March of 2015. The posts on Polyfest are a combination of individual and personal experiences of Polyfest, alongside commercial media outlets and organisations promoting their presence at the event. These include comments in both English and Niuean, both from those residing in Auckland, and those residing in Niue. Furthermore, about one month after the 'real-time'/'live' posts, I observed several new shares, posts, and comments when the Niue Stage segment was aired on television.



As another example of Polyfest within Niuean digital transnationalism, Figure 41 is a Facebook post shared by one of the tutors of Niue group, preparing for Polyfest. It is a picture of the team after a rehearsal, a few days before the big event was to take place.



Figure 41 – Screenshot of a Facebook post, after a team practice

To contextualise and charge the image with meaning and a message, the author of the post writes:

“Polyfest is not only embracing the importance of our wonderful beautiful gem culture of niue! Its about instilling purpose & and belonging; resilience and

integrity, leadership! And humility! WE ARE ALL IN THIS 2GETHER!! Regardless of the competition 1purpose NIUE!! Teamwork!!”

In Figure 41 you see the ‘reach’ of this post, with at least 147 ‘likes’ and five comments. The post reflects both the value of Polyfest to the author and their ‘followers’, but also the cultural significance of participating, at all levels; even by ‘liking’ or commenting on a Polyfest related post. This post is making claim about what it means to be Niuean. This is a statement which reflects the author’s ‘heart’ and love for their culture and their nation; regardless of the competition, the author reminds the audience that they are all working together to embrace the beautiful gem of Niue culture. This post is another example of the way Polyfest is a digital media event for Niueans, and a subset of Niuean digital transnationalism.

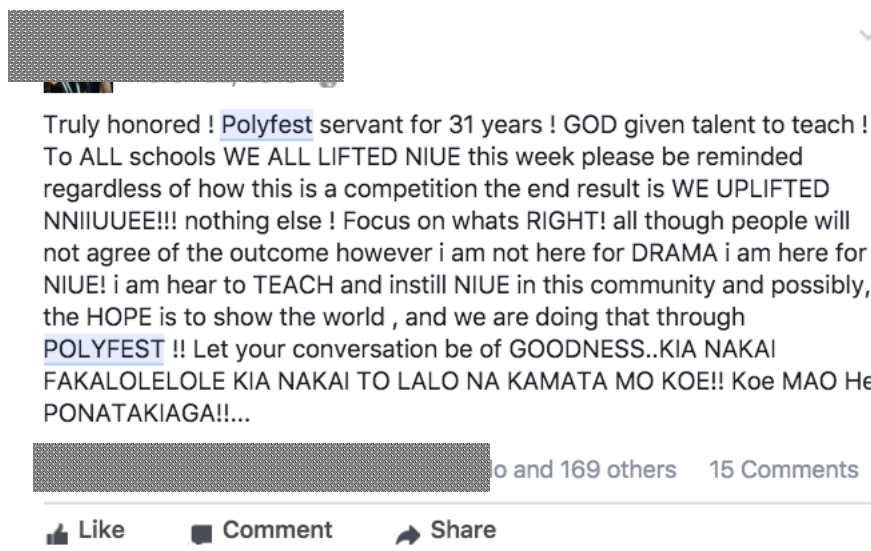


Figure 42 – Screenshot of a Facebook Post, Before the Competition Begins

Figure 42 shows a follow-up Facebook post from the same author. The post is directed as a reminder to all the participants of the competition to focus on celebrating Niue, and not the drama which can happen between teams behind the scenes. The text is as follows:

“Truly honored ! Polyfest servant for 31 years ! GOD given talent to teach ! To ALL schools WE ALL LIFTED NIUE this week please be reminded regardless of how this is a competition the end result is WE UPLIFTED NNIIUUEE!!! nothing else ! Focus on whats RIGHT! all though people will not agree of the outcome however i am not here for DRAMA i am here for NIUE! i am hear to TEACH and instill NIUE in this community and possibly, the HOPE is to show the world, and we are doing that through POLYFEST !! Let your conversation be of GOODNESS.. KIA NAKAI FAKALOLELOLE KIA NAKAI TO LALO NA KAMATA MO KOE!! Koe MAO He PONATAKIAGA!!...”

The author urges the audience to “uplift Niue and nothing else.” The audience is urged to keep their eyes on the greater prize: Niue culture and identity being celebrated and perpetuated. The comments and ‘likes’ showed community approval and support of the posts sentiment – Another example of Niuean digital transnationalism.

However, the pointed politicking surrounding Polyfest and what it means to be Niuean are but one type of post within a larger spectrum of posts which make Polyfest a digital media event. The smiling selfie whilst sitting in the crowd, or the backstage pre-performance group photo also adds to the ‘work’ of the Polyfest digital media event; extending the temporal and geographic reach of the physical event. For example, Figure 43 shows a Facebook post of a proud aunt celebrating the achievement of her nephew. The text is accompanied by several

photos taken of his performance. The post has 29 'likes' and four comments from friends and family, signifying a joint celebration of the young man's performance.



Figure 43 – Screenshot of a Facebook Post, celebrating nephew's involvement in Polyfest

Similarly, Figure 44 shares a video of the Wesley College performance, with congratulatory praise for winning first place in one of the categories. This video was viewed 1700 times, shared by 11, and 'liked' by 244. This post also demonstrates the way Polyfest as a digital media event has the power to influence sentiment throughout the Niuean transnational social field. Polyfest as a digital media event not only documents an aspect of Niuean sociality and transnationality, it is also an opportunity for the broader community, who may

not be able to physically be there, participate digitally. Polyfest as a digital media event allows more Niueans to connect with their Niuean-ness, and reinforce other Niuean digital transnationality one may be already engaging in.

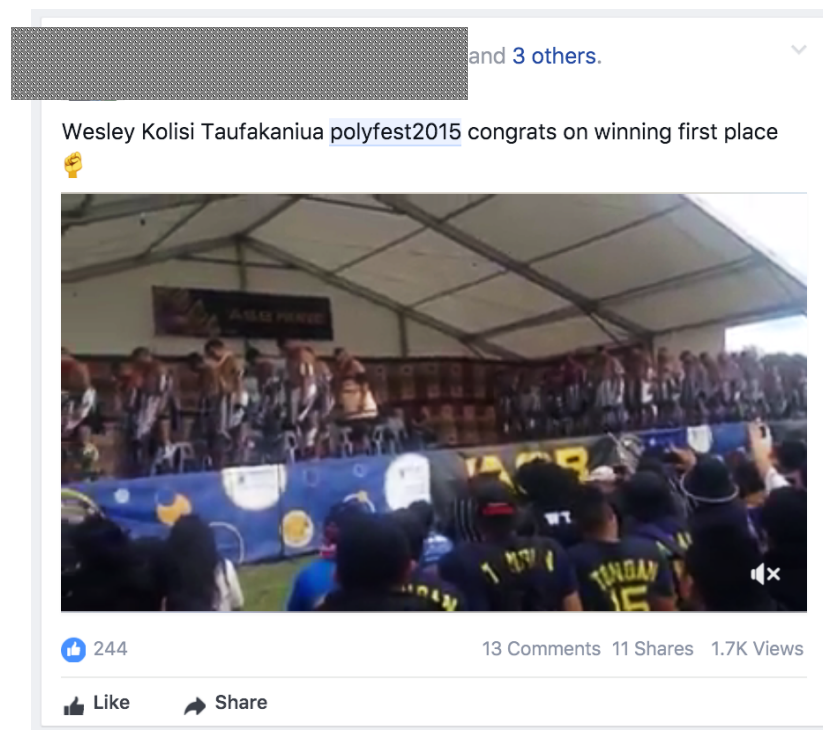


Figure 44 – Screenshot of a Facebook Post, celebrating Wesley College's win

Polyfest related posts like those above are examples of Niuean digital transnationalism. The act of posting is part of the performative practice of their transnationalism, as fostered by digital media environments. The content or message within the post is a reflection of the individual's negotiation of personal identity as well as their sense of nationhood or group identity. Digital Media influence ways in which Niueans choose to express their 'belonging', as well as express sentiments of what that means to them.

Though Polyfest on its own has affect on Niueans' sense of belonging to their Niuean-ness, digital media are helping to express, constitute and negotiate these transnational identities further. Digital Media not only makes the participation of the negotiation of Niuean cultural identity more convenient, going beyond geographic and temporal limitations, but also makes nationalistic statements more public and visible.

## Conclusion

Polyfest is a cultural event that is important for Niueans. It is an environment for young people to establish, reinforce and strengthen cultural identities and attachments to one's 'homeland(s)'. This is very significant, especially for a recent generation who have inherited a homeland from their grandparents, yet perhaps never set foot, nor familiar with the language. Polyfest is seen as a right of passage in the formative years of a young Niuean's journey to 'belonging' to their Niuean-ness. As mentioned earlier, when speaking with other members of the Niuean community in Auckland, it was apparent that many saw Polyfest as carrying out two things: the greater appreciation of the Niuean people in Auckland, and providing the impetus for a deeper passion for cultural heritage among the younger generation. However, as part of this cultural identity work, it is also a powerful *media event*, and specifically a *digital media event* and a subset of *digital transnationalism*.

In this chapter, after underscoring the cultural significance of Polyfest as a real-world event with its own power and influence, I focussed on the co-construction

that was happening in Polyfest as a real-time physical event and as a digital media event. Krotz (2010) states that the co-presence created through the mediation of cultural rituals allows the extension of time and place, and the opportunity for individuals to 'connect' to moments and spaces they could not be in physically. Experiencing Polyfest as a digital media event has been a means for Niueans to extend, negotiate, and articulate a personal sense of pride and belonging to their Niuean-ness. During fieldwork, my interlocutors expressed the need 'preserve' their culture and traditions and saw participation in events such as Polyfest as part of this process. Besides family functions, church, cultural workshops, and classes, cultural festivals like Polyfest are an important way in which young people learn about, engage with, and 'own' their cultural 'roots.' Polyfest is a major contributor in shaping the 'Pacific Islander' identity in New Zealand, and it provides a public platform for each distinctive people group to express their cultural individuality, thereby supporting Auckland's 'unity in diversity' ethos. By extension, Polyfest is a space of Niuean ritual and pilgrimage in shaping Niuean identity and culture. Amplified as a digital media event, it is an important tool of the Niuean transnational social field, shaping ideas about belonging, culture, and identity. It is thus a subset of Niuean digital transnationalism.

If Polyfest were to be analysed as a traditional 'media event' it may fail to qualify as one. Although there is television coverage, it does not interrupt normal TV scheduling, nor is it broadcast live. Although it does not gather the worldwide, nor even national attention required by Dayan and Katz's model of a media event, within the Polynesian community in Auckland it is impossible to not know

about Polyfest, and it will more than likely be flooding your social media ‘feed’ for many days. For most Pacific Islanders, and of course Niueans, Polyfest is therefore a significant digital media event. It is a space where Niueans were saying something about their culture and identity, yet it is also in the ‘ripple effect’ of the Facebook posts and tweets where this dialogue is amplified and provides an opportunity for co-construction of identity. This takes Polyfest beyond being merely a standalone event. Its significance is in the way it is refracted through several media channels and platforms. Whether experienced first-hand and/or mediated through a smartphone or computer screen, it is also *re-mediated* and co-constructed through ‘shares,’ ‘re-tweets,’ ‘likes,’ commentary, and comments, arguably forging deeper senses of belonging to and connection with a sense of Niuean culture and identity.

Like the Niueans in Niue, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four, due to several factors such as the ‘threat’ of modernity and the fact that Niue is considered a minority within a minority, there is also a strong ‘preservation’ agenda apparent amid the Niuean transnational social field living in Auckland. For respondents, Polyfest as both a real-world festival and a digital media event has been a means to negotiate and articulate a sense of both individual and group belongingness. In addition, digital media makes the co-construction of what it means to be Niuean more visible, further aiding and extending the preservation agenda. On a broader level, Polyfest fits into a greater ‘preservation’ and nationalistic agenda. Like Georges’ (Schiller and Fouron, 2001), example of nostalgia and ‘home’ away from home. I argue that the different ways in which Niueans participate in Polyfest is also a form of long-distance nationalism.



Many participants see Polyfest as a kind of 'rite of passage' in the Niuean transnational social field, with ritualistic significance at all levels of engagement. Participation in Polyfest can be as in depth as being a tutor, or student performer, to participation as a live audience member, or an observer/participator via digital media. Polyfest not only has significant cultural meaning for Niueans who are highly engaged with their cultural identity, it is also a space for those who are not so engaged with the transnational social field. Polyfest, whether experienced first-hand or as a digital media event is a space where Niueans who are not pro-active in their *belonging*, can belong, even for the few moments during which they view performances at Polyfest. This can only occur as the event is remediated through traditional and social media, naturally crossing national borders along the same lines as relational networks. Polyfest is filmed and televised, and Facebook is used by both individuals and organisations to promote the event, build excitement, and provide 'live' coverage through Twitter and Facebook. Individuals' commentary, congratulations, and commiserations are posted on; Still and moving pictures are tagged #polyfest2015 or #niuepride and other variations. Those of which draw friends and followers to comment, 'like,' and 'share.' Supporting, expanding and transforming the cultural preservation work of Polyfest.

In conclusion, Polyfest is a nationalistic endeavour with an agenda to strengthen a personal attachment to Niue as 'home.' It is significant in the way in which the Niuean transnational social field invest their time, energy, and emotions into taking their engagement from merely *being* in the social field to *belonging* (Levitt

and Schiller, 2004). Polyfest is not simply a physical event that has the power to mediate a 'preservation message.' Rather, the digital media event surrounding this festival extends, documents, and even archives Polyfest's message(s). A digital media event is created as individuals share their participation, observation, and appreciation with their social networks via digital media. This is a significant aspect of Niuean digital transnationalism. In the following chapter I describe other ways that engagement with Niuean culture and identity has been shaped and negotiated through the affordance and influence of digital and social media; other forms of Niuean digital transnationalism.

## **Chapter 7:** *Digital Transnationalism: a ‘Heart’ for ‘Home’*

*“YNKNW when your nena tells you off for cutting the taro wrong for the takihi!”*

*“YNKNW you turn 40, want to learn the language, find out who are your  
relatives, and claim a block of land. lol”*

(posts on the ‘You Know You’re Niuean When...’ Facebook page)

### **Introduction**

In this and the previous chapter I analyse Niueans’ relationships with ICTs and social media as part of a broader suite of strategies used in personal and group identity construction and relationship mediation. This chapter examines the existing desire for Niuean transnationalism and nation-making from a distance. I explore how digital media reflects and extends these concepts and creates a new platform upon which the performative practice of Niuean transnationalism can take place. The ways that Niueans are engaging in nationalistic activities (both from ‘above,’ ‘below,’ and ‘in-between’) highlight the affordances of transnational communication and digital media in the co-construction of what Niueans think it means to be Niuean.

A major theme of research of transnationalism is the role of transnationalism to impact both personal and national identity. One aspect particularly salient for my research is the concept of long-distance nationalism. Whilst a key aspect of research of The Digital is the role of mobile and digital media in designing, displaying and disseminating identity. Of course Transnationalism would not be what it has become without the ability to for people to communicate. Yet digital media is further transforming the mode, means and meaning of exchange. As such, digital transnationalism essentially underscores the part digital media (and the technologies that support it) are playing in experiences of transnationalism. Previous work on the lived experiences of transnationalism (Levitt and Schiller, 2004) includes research on remittances and sending money back home to the family, keeping in contact and parenting from a distance, and how migrants engage in political activism in their home country although they now live elsewhere. Digital transnationalism is underscored by cultural politics, social dynamics, and lived geographies of transnational people, as well as their digital media practices and communicative assemblages (Yeoh et al., 2003; Vertovec, 1999; Parham, 2004; Portes, 1996; Lee, 2009; Mau, 2010; Portes et al., 1999; Fechter, 2007; Levitt, 2001; Vertovec, 2009; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Addo, 2013; Gershon, 2012). However, my research focuses on how digital media is extending and facilitating transnational lives through the co-construction of meaning and community and identity. Niue is an example of this phenomenon whereby attachments to land and place may be more digital than real, where the intention to build 'Niue pride' is more about creating a 'movement' without moving, and where the digital is seen as a tool to co-create what it means to be Niuean. All these factors add nuance to how we understand transnational lives.

This research focuses on the difference the digital has made, particularly emphasising the ways in which new media forms have reinforced, extended, and amplified transnational experiences. Most notably, I investigate how digital media interfaces with the politics and daily practices of transnational persons, and how digital media platforms and their affordances also become the infrastructure of the transnational social field experience, extending and amplifying the nation-making, cultural revitalisation, and reproduction activities that were perhaps previously less visible and less far-reaching.

As discussed, Schiller and Fouron (2001) depict Haitian long distance nationalism and the search for 'home' among those who now live in the United States. Further works such as those by Fechter (2007), Cohen (2008), Madianou and Miller (2012), Lee (2003), and Guarnizo and Smith (1998) suggest that, on a personal level, transnational experiences of permanent migration, and economic trade activities by expatriates and working holiday makers often kindle the imaginations and nostalgia of 'home.' These emotional longings for 'home,' as well as the use of ICTs and social media to communicate with family and friends overseas, creates a simultaneity of 'place' and 'space' that would not occur without the existence of physical separation and geographic dislocation to begin with (Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Pries, 1999). From a social transnationalism perspective, transnationalism is explored through new forms of cross-border interactions and mobility that have expanded across physical space.

## Co-Constructing Through Transnational Communication

In addition to nationalistic movements to maintain Niuean language and culture, which could be seen as ‘transnationalism from above’ (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), nationalistic revitalisation and reproduction also occurs ‘from below’ in day-to-day life and personal communications. For example, as mentioned earlier, the large-scale global reach of many multi-national corporations and brands, the cross-cultural influence of traditional media streams, and bi-lateral political agreements are seen as markers of globalisation and transnationalism. These large-scale governmental and corporate agendas are described by Smith and Guarnizo as bringing influences “from above” (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), whereas personal and relational interactions are seen as being influences from “below.” In particular, this influence from below occurs primarily as communication in transnational relationship mediation. In other words, and in particular to my research, transnationalism is not only the large scale events like Polyfest, it is also the daily communication and interactions, such as an email or Facebook post. These interactions maintain and cultivate relational connection between Niueans in Auckland and those in Niue, and therefore connection to ‘home’.

Panagakos and Horst (2006) are informed by Escobar’s (1994) concept of ‘Cyberia’ in their assessment of how and why transnational populations use particular ICTs. They pay particular attention to the ways in which generation, settlement history, cultural values, class, access, and homeland and host country politics influence these practices. This is illustrated through Martha’s own experience of chain migration (Chapter Five) in which migrated away from home

to pursue greater employment opportunities. Migration aimed at the attainment of greater economic standing has been a major feature of migration and transnationalism. The economic necessity of feeding and maintaining a family, coupled with the desire for a 'better life,' has meant many families have made the choice to become separated by physical distance, yet actively maintain their connections (both on and offline).

Mahler's (2001) research on family dynamics taking place between villages in El Salvador and the United States highlights the communicative ecologies and social politics involved in 'making a living' in New York and maintaining a family in rural El Salvador. Other studies also engage with the communication of care of other transnational social fields and connections through letters, phone calls, envelopes, care packages, and barrels (Vertovec, 2004; Parham, 2004; Karim, 1998; Portes, 1996; Madianou and Miller, 2012; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Yeoh et al., 2005; Wilding, 2006). Similarly, cheaper call rates enabled by international calling cards that have been offered since the late 1980s and 1990s have become the 'social glue' facilitating many relationships that travel across time and space: As Vertove explains, "Cheap telephone calls have largely facilitated this. It is not common for a single family to be stretched across vast distances and between nation-states, yet still retain its sense of collectivity" (Vertovec, 2004: 222).

Migration, transnationalism, and ICT use was also the focus of research by Mitchell and Hansen (2010), and examines the unique capacity of transnational communication in lives lived across borders in the mediation of migrant identities, the maintenance and negotiation of kinship networks across

geographic distances, and the cross-pollination of ideas and symbolism in ‘nation building’ amid diasporic identities (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Fortunati et al., 2012; Tupai Francis and Lee, 2009; Mahler, 2001; Yeoh et al., 2005; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Karim, 1998; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2013).

The world today is being consistently transformed by internal and external migration... Coming from elsewhere, and using ICTs, migrants may choose to escape the inertia and fixivity of their new local culture or they may interweave it with their own cultural differences into one new fabric. Looking at migrants through the lens of ICT use offers new knowledge about a body of humankind on the move with a mobile phone in their pocket, or access to the Internet to guide them, keep them in touch and maintain their life wherever they may be.

(Fortunati et al., 2012: Foreword)

Furthermore, recent technologies have enabled financial remittances through agencies such as banks, Western Union, and through mobile money. The Internet and social media have also brought a new suite of transnational communication avenues, with transnationals often using multiple platforms at a time and maintaining ‘running conversations’ with multiple people.

The Internet opens up our network and extends our possibilities to communicate and interact with people. The ‘meeting place’ or ‘publishing outlet’ for the social activist(s) may have been made available through the actual existence of the Internet. People’s decision to engage with and use ICTs and ‘personal media,’ and for what cause, are both a question of access and choice.



For example, Sana, a 20-year-old woman who lives in Niue, had been back and forth between Niue, New Zealand, and Australia several times. Three of her four sisters live in Auckland, and the other is in Brisbane. They too had been back to visit family and friends several times. Sana explained that her sisters overseas didn't really have to send money, but they would send the occasional gift if there was a special occasion or an emergency. However, when her sisters would visit their suitcases would be filled with gifts for her and her family—usually clothes and gadgets that weren't available in Niue. On their last trip over, Sana had asked for an iPod. When asked how she remained connected with her family overseas, Sana explained that the main way was through Facebook:

You know everyone's OK if you put up a picture, or post up a status... we know you're on Facebook, so you're 'fine' – if you have the energy to go on Facebook means obviously there isn't anything wrong (laughs)... the good thing about Facebook is that you get to know how people are doing or what's going on in their lives because they tend to post their whole life story on Facebook... so you always know what's going on...

Sana admitted, “The only reason I’m on Facebook is because my family overseas want to see photos of my daughter.” Sana understood that her family felt connected to her if she posted photos and updates on her life. Sana’s experience reflects how Madianou and Miller’s (2012) concept of polymedia plays out in relationship mediation on multiple platforms such as Facebook, Skype, phone calls, and texts. However, as Sana explained, “My sister is on the phone (landline) '24/7' to her partner in Australia,” mainly due to the low Internet speeds in Niue

that made Skype unreliable and choppy and unsatisfying. This is frustrating for Sana as she is not able to use the phone when her sister is on it.

### **Niue's Communicative Assemblages**

In addition to technology and infrastructure, Niue's communicative ecology is made up of the ways that Niueans engage with and situate themselves within the bigger picture. It is therefore important to analyse the communicative ecology of the individual. For this study I recruited several people to participate in formal interviews in which they were asked open-ended questions about how they communicate, by what means they mediate communications, what they are communicating, and why. I then constructed individual 'communicative profiles' from this data. I offer three profiles to illustrate Niue's communicative ecologies of Niue in more detail than the census data can provide.

Jess (from Chapter 3) and Sione's experiences (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) suggest that Niueans have had access to commercial computer technology since the late 1980s and free public WiFi since the early 2000s. Despite these statistics however, not every family could afford a personal computer or laptop for each child. This was attempted to be addressed in 2008 with the OLPC campaign. Although Niue was able to fulfil the 'call' to provide every child with a laptop, there were several incompatibilities with existing computers and printers, which resulted in the eventual phasing out of the OLPC program. Though it may have been considered a failed development project, on the other hand, this program could be attributed with facilitating the high digital and computer literacy of Niueans today.

## Personal Communicative Profiles:

### Albert:

Albert is twenty years old and was born and raised in Niue. He lived with his parents and younger siblings, and he works for the government. Unlike most of his classmates, Albert was yet to go away to study, but hoped to in the future. However, this did not mean he had not left the country. Albert had gone to New Zealand several times to visit family, and was hopeful to be sent abroad for work one day. Despite this, Albert had not really thought about his future prospects outside of Niue. Albert counted himself fortunate to have a job, and perhaps because of his situation at the time, when asked about his future, he responded with a long-term view of his life in Niue. Similarly, due to my research interest in ICTs and communication, one of the things he exclaimed he would like to see in the future was “better Internet.” Albert’s relationship with media and technology can be described as long-term, customary, and ingrained into most aspects of his life. Figure 45 below is Albert’s communicative practices

Albert lived twenty minutes from his office. He has his own car and drives to work each day. When asked to describe his day, he said: “(We arrive at) 8 o'clock - that's when our work starts... Get to work. Check the emails and stuff... sometimes we go out to the field, but most of the time, we're here in the office doing work on our laptops.” His work in the office was mainly administrative support, sending emails, and coordinating with relevant stakeholders. The work day usually ended by four, and then he would head straight home. Spare time was generally spent at rugby training (nearly every weekday evening); if not, he would work out on his own or spend time with his girlfriend. There are also

chores at home that he needed to do, and depending on the season he and other family members would go into the bush to the family plantation, or out to sea for spear fishing.

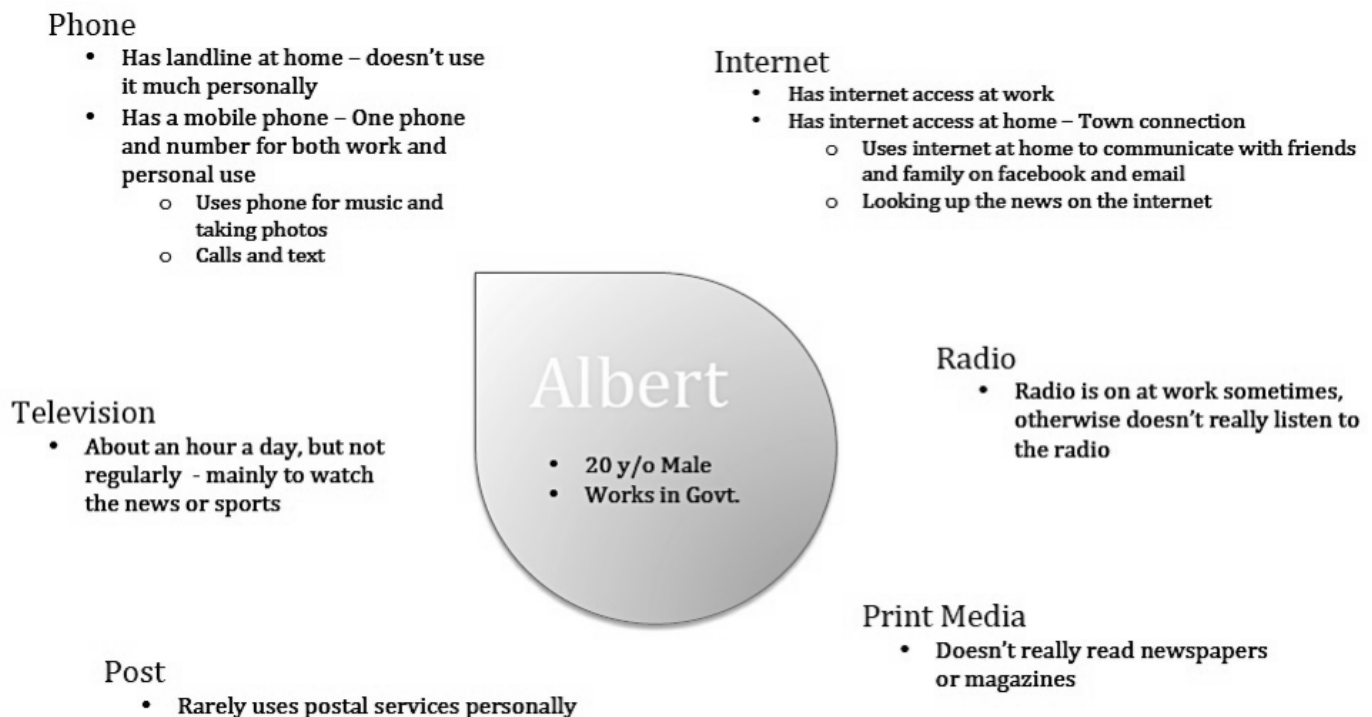


Figure 45 – Communicative Ecologies Map of Albert, 20y/o Male, Residing in Niue

Albert's communications were predominantly via the mobile phone or on the Internet. He had a late model Nokia that did not have WiFi capabilities. He laughed with slight embarrassment as he showed me his phone, and explained that it was his sixth because he had lost and broken so many. Because of his track record with phones he thought it best that he didn't get a more expensive iPhone or Samsung S4 (the latest Samsung phone at the time). He used his phone mainly

for the text and call functions, but also used it for playing music and taking photos. His most frequent contacts on his mobile were his work colleagues, then his girlfriend. Albert also had a Facebook account and checked it regularly. He had a laptop and tablet at home that connect to the village WiFi. "I go on it (Facebook), but I don't post so much stuff... not as much as other people," he mentioned with a roll of the eyes and a chuckle.

The diagram (Figure 45) is a visual map of the communicative ecology which Albert embeds his communicative practices. Communicative ecology profiling shows how Albert chooses to construct the relational apparatus available to him in his own unique way, and highlights the media influences in his life. The map indicates that, like some of the other respondents, he uses multiple ways to connect to and disconnect from his world. Further discussion with Albert reveals how he uses the Internet, video games, and music to relax and 'escape from reality,' and also uses his laptop to watch international sports news online, check out the latest songs in New Zealand, and connect with friends and family on Facebook.

#### Fitipua:

Fitipua is a student in her final year of high school and a similar age to Albert. They have both had similar experiences with ICTs and access to the same technologies and communication platforms, such as Facebook and email:

At first I kind of questioned the relevance of even having it (mobiles in Niue), cos we have landlines, and email or Facebook cos of the Internet... so I dunno. I thought it was cool though. Cos it was new.

When going into further detail about her mobile phone use she recalled:

It took a while to get used to mobile phones... I would always leave my phone because I wasn't used to bringing it with me everywhere.

Fitipua made these comments while holding her mobile phone in one hand and her iPod in her other.

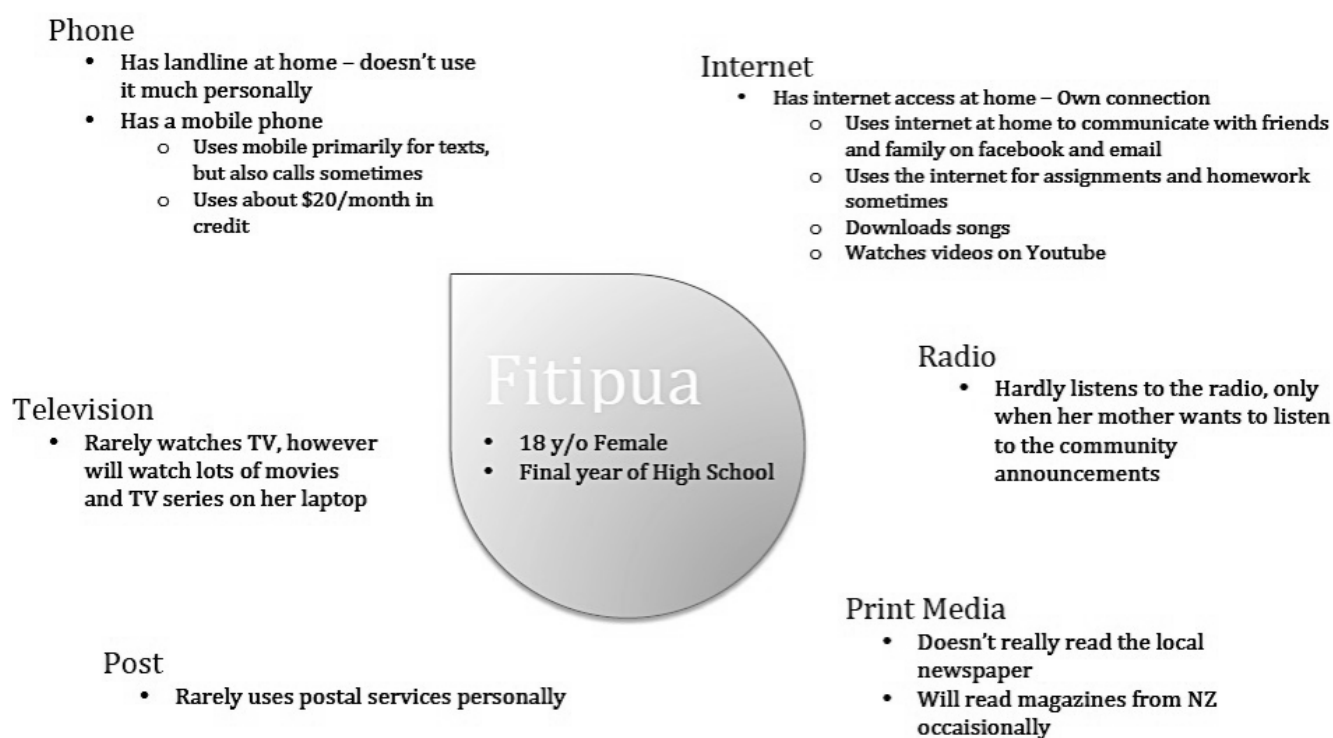


Figure 46 – Communicative Ecologies Map of Fitipua, 18y/o Female, Residing in Niue

I only have this basic one though, 'cause I already had my iPod... I do all my WiFi stuff here (motioning to her iPod) and texting and calling on the mobile.

It's not like we didn't know about mobile phones, and most people had them, 'cause of when they visit overseas, they needed them, but they just sat in drawer... It started as a rumour, but then we started to see people actually using them, like to talk – a few people were testing the network, and the word spread... I was so excited, and I was like, finally!

Fitipua and I sat around the table with all her 'gadgets' laid out. She had a laptop, an iPod, and a 'basic' mobile phone. She also pointed out her sister's iPad on top of a pile of books on the other side of the room: "My sister won't let me touch it 'cause she's worried I'll wreck it. We had to get a new laptop recently because I dropped the last one." Technically they were supposed to share most things, but her sister bought the iPad with her own money and claimed she had every right to restrict her sister's access.

Fitipua explained that she often used the laptop for school assignments as well as for social networking sites like Facebook. She recalled how her older sister had Bebo and Myspace, which were more popular a few years back. We laughed as she described her habit of alternatively using the laptop and her iPod when going through Facebook or chatting to her friends online. She became highly animated as she shared how she would intermittently use her mobile phone to text, then pick up the iPod or the laptop for Facebook, and then shift back again: "If mum

calls me to do something, I'll usually bring my iPod, so I can still message while I'm doing what she's asked me to do... and if I have to go out to buy something from the shops, I'll take my phone and use text to continue the conversation."

Rodney:

Rodney is in his late forties and is a returned resident of Niue. He grew up in Niue but completed his tertiary studies abroad, and lived and worked in New Zealand and Australia for the first part of his career. Rodney's parents did not have the opportunity to study overseas, but they had travelled to visit their other children and grandchildren who resided in New Zealand. Niue has most of the technological infrastructures of today's developed world, yet Rodney is interesting in that he had the capability to access several communication technologies and tools but chose not to. Rodney was proud not to have Facebook and said that he rarely checked his personal email. He laughed while telling how his old friends from overseas got so frustrated with him for not replying to their emails and keeping in closer contact with them. Rodney chose not to have a mobile phone mainly because he did not want people to constantly call him. He also chose not to have a landline phone in his home. However, Rodney is 'fully connected' in the work setting, where he constantly accesses his work email and can be contacted via phone.



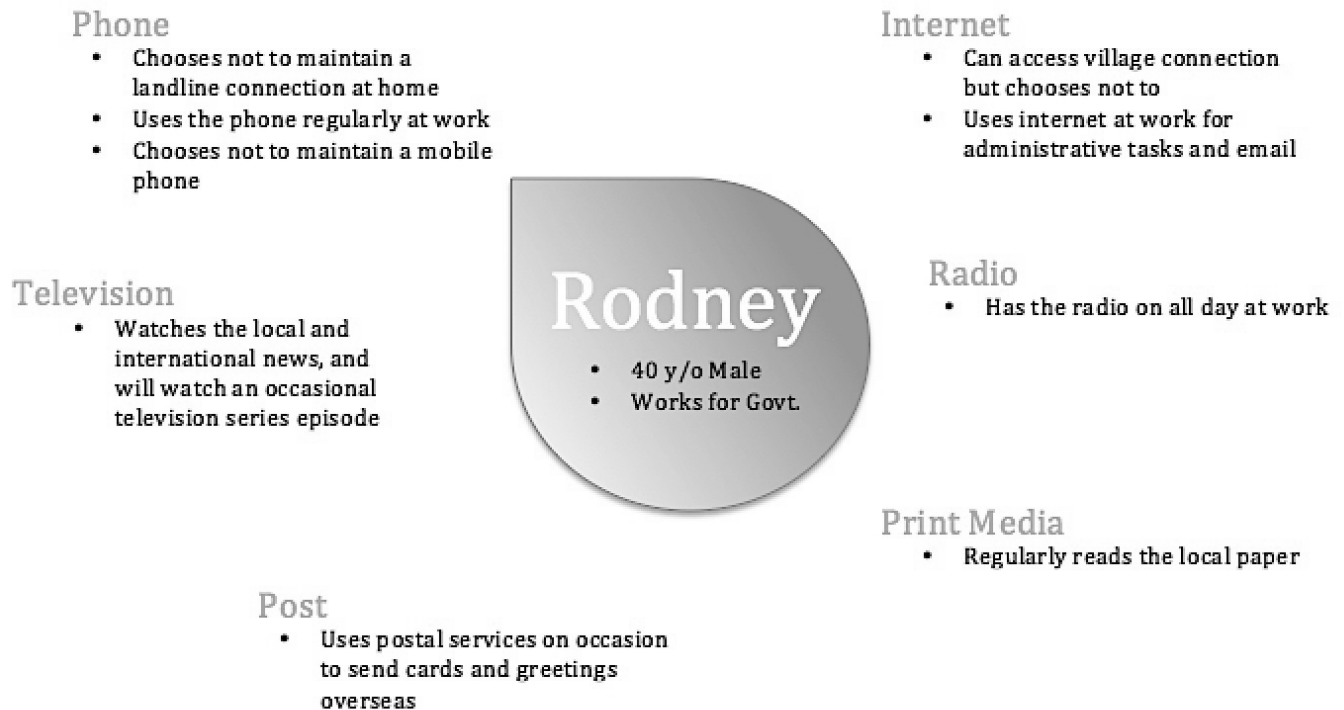


Figure 47 - Communicative Ecologies Map of Rodney – 40y/o Male, Residing in Niue

This exercise in communicative ecologies profiling (Hearn et al., 2009) shows how Albert and Fitipua chose to construct the relational apparatus available to them in their own unique way. It highlights the media channels they choose to access, or in Rodney's case chooses not to access. The mapping and profiling indicates that, like most respondents, they use multiple ways to connect and disconnect with their world. Public WiFi is accessible almost everywhere on the island, but it is still limited and must be strategically negotiated. As a result, research participants made certain decisions on how to navigate these infrastructures. During discussions, Fitipua explained that she was disappointed with the mobile network when it was erected as she imagined that it would fulfil its promise to 'fill the gaps' that landlines and the Internet had left. Much to her

disappointment, not all areas are covered at this stage, and because it is only a 2G network it is still patchy.

Fitipua, like Albert, did not use ‘traditional media’ in Niue to gather information. She used the Internet and ‘word of mouth’ (whether face-to-face or via ICTs) to keep in touch with events on the island and international news. She primarily used the Internet for research for class assignments and homework in conjunction with library books accessed at school. On the other hand, Rodney relied on the television and radio to learn about local and international news, and he rarely turned to the Internet. Although Rodney chose to be unreachable at home he was fully connected at work, regularly using email, the landline phone, and the Internet to gather information for his administrative tasks.

### **Organisational Communicative Profiles**

In order to understand the impact of ICTD in Niue, I also researched infrastructure on the island as a holistic framework. In particular, I paid close attention to the available computer and communication technologies. In addition, to gain a more granular perspective, I investigated how these infrastructures fitted into people’s daily lives, which tools individuals used to communicate, and how they used them. What follows is an illustration of these ‘in action.’ I then examine the idea of ‘choice’ and ‘capabilities’ that these ICTs and infrastructures afford and how Niueans navigated them on a daily basis.

**A Climate Change Workshop:** During fieldwork I was invited to attend a community engagement workshop on climate change in Tamakautoga, a village of approximately 120 people located a fifteen-minute drive south of Alofi. Attendees were informed about the impacts of climate change and how they could help on a personal level. The workshop also identified several development projects to aid the community in the event of a natural disaster, such as improving tracks that lead to higher ground, protocols around water management when the power goes out, and so on. As the workshop was drawing to a close I spoke to the workshop convener. The convenor lamented the low level of attendance, stating that they would have preferred that the whole village had been there. I then enquired into how they had advertised the event. I was advised that the Village Council had personally handed each household a letter of invitation that outlined all the details. Follow-up reminders were done closer to the event in an informal way via interpersonal communications. The meeting was held mid-week during the day, so it was understood that those who were not there were at work. As a result, the majority in attendance were the older members of the Tamakautogan community.

**A Village Show Day:** Another woman, Tanita, who had been elected to the Village Council the year before, explained she had been attending more meetings than normal because their Village Show Day was coming up. Throughout the year, each village hosts a 'Show Day' where the villagers present the best of their crafts, produce, dance, and musical talent. The day is also filled with activities for the children and there are food stalls and a chance to socialise. Preparing for a village Show Day involves intense logistic co-ordination to ensure a successful

event. Tanita advised that Village Council members normally communicated via a combination of face-to-face, emails, and phone calls. A priority for Tanita was making sure the organisers knew how many food stalls would operate and who would be entering their crafts or crops for judging. These finer details are mostly taken care of in the village meetings leading up to the show day.

### **Platforms for Digital Transnationalism**

As mentioned, large-scale governmental and corporate agendas are described by Smith and Guarnizo as bringing influences “from above” (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), whereas personal and relational interactions are seen as being influences from “below.” The affordances of transnational communication tools and new media platforms have enabled Niue nation-making efforts from ‘below.’ In particular, this influence from below occurs primarily as communication in transnational relationship mediation. This includes ‘hearts’, ‘likes’ and comments on people’s posts. In other words, digital transnationalism is seen in the public social media posts of digital media events like Polyfest, and it is in also the private daily communication and interaction between family and friends. These interactions maintain and cultivate relational connection between Niueans in Auckland and those in Niue, and therefore a two-way transnational connection to ‘home’ and to each other. It is important to understand the communicative ecologies in which these communications are taking place. This next section gives further ethnographic account of how digital transnationalism from ‘below’ was taking place during fieldwork in 2014.

Sana (first introduced in Chapter Three) explained: “If you go on at the right time, you can sometimes Skype... but that’s usually in the middle of the night, when everyone else is asleep [therefore, not online]... but even then, it might be choppy!” Sana has access to a landline and a mobile phone, and can make international calls with either, but she still prefers to use the Internet to communicate with her family in Auckland because it is free. She and her family feel more connected through regular communication and Facebook updates. Although her family love to see photos of Sana’s young daughter, and would love to Skype or Facetime, the limited bandwidth and Internet speeds of Niue’s public WiFi make video-calls and sending large data files a challenge. For Niueans like Sana, Facebook messaging and email are platforms used to ‘keep in touch,’ although connecting, loading, and uploading is time-consuming and frustrating.

Another participant, ‘Lopa,’ also a resident of Niue, shared how much she appreciated access to the Internet to keep in touch with family overseas. She credited Facebook for connecting families, even though they are geographically distant. A few years ago it was her son’s ‘hair cutting’ ceremony, which is a major milestone in a young man’s life, and some of her family who live in Australia were not able to attend. Fortunately, they were able to see photos and send greetings via Facebook, and participate from a distance. Her aunt also sent some money as a gift and called via the telephone to give their regards. The cultural practice entails not cutting a young boy’s hair until the ‘coming of age’ celebration, which is essentially their first haircut. Although the origins of this practice are uncertain, and the age varies from family to family, it remains an important ceremony in Niuean culture. Indeed, it is so important that the whole

family, village, and practically the whole island have the honour of cutting a portion of the boy's hair, which is kept as a token. Because the celebrations are large and many Niuean families are spread across several countries, there is considerable preparation and planning beforehand to ensure that family members are in attendance and all cultural expectations of gifting and reciprocity are met. Taro must be planted several months ahead and pigs reared over several years, party supplies such as decorations, banners, and disposable cutlery are ordered at least a few months in advance or arrive in the luggage of the family members flying in from Auckland. There have been hair-cutting ceremonies in Auckland that Lopa herself has not been able to attend, and like her aunt she has sent greetings and gifts from afar. Lopa explained that being there in person is ideal to physically cut the hair; however, photos of the event were uploaded to Facebook, which made her feel part of the celebrations.

Martha's grandmother is now an avid Facebook user, but at first she had no idea what it was. A few years ago she began receiving compliments and comments about the wonderful photos her son had put up on Facebook of her and her family. Martha's father had uploaded photos of a family gathering and friends and relatives who had seen the pictures mentioned them to Martha's grandmother (face-to-face), who hadn't actually seen the images herself.

"Photos? What photos? Facebook? What's this Facebook?" Martha mimicked. Her older brother bought their grandmother a laptop, and they set up an account for her and taught her how to log in and "now she loves it, especially the chat function... as soon as she sees the green light..." Martha explained with a smile that almost every time they were both online she would hear the sound of a

received message and it would be her nanna asking how she is, although they only live a few houses from each other. Martha recently shared images of a Sunday family lunch, which elicited numerous comments (both in English and Niuean, from friends and relatives on and off island) all wishing to be part the occasion. The Facebook posts, online chat, and comments provide Martha's family with another method of interaction and an added layer to the face-to-face and daily communications for those who live in the same village, as well as a means to connect with family members who now live overseas.

Another participant, Hannah, is part of the Niue Youth Council, which is a chapter of the Pacific Youth Council (PYC). The PYC was established as a regional voluntary, non-governmental organisation of National Youth Councils in the Pacific region with an agenda to raise youth issues and give young people of the Pacific a 'voice.' The 12th of August 2013 was International Youth Day and the theme was: 'Youth Migration - Moving Development Forward.' In the spirit of 'migration' and 'movement,' the Niue Youth Council organised a morning walk from one side of the island to the other. The walk was advertised through the Niue Youth Council Facebook page, email, and by word of mouth. The discussion about issues that were affecting young people of the Pacific was conducted both on and off-line, and Niuean youth were encouraged to do further research into the issues online. Hannah used public WiFi mainly to go on Facebook and chat with her friends from university, as well as with family members who were abroad. In order to advocate for the pressing youth issues in the Pacific, her participation in the Niue Youth Council required digital communication with the young people in Niue as well as the other Youth Council members in the region.

Hannah's participation in discussions of economics and politics in the region was another facet of digital transnationalism that was enabled by the communicative ecology of the island.

Niueans perceive their public WiFi, and ICTs in general, as a way to connect Niue to the rest of the world, something quite important for a relatively isolated island with only one flight a week, and sea freight once a month. Niueans are using the Internet to access social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, in order to communicate and interact both locally and transnationally. The Niue Tourism department also strategically uses more cost-effective options such as a website and a Facebook page to promote Niue as a great tourist destination for those who have never been, and to entice friends and relatives to visit regularly. Interestingly, Niueans are uploading photographs of passengers who arrive to Niue on incoming flights onto Facebook (Tacchi et al., 2013), many 'tagging' their friends and family. This sparks a 'welcome home' or 'farewell and come again soon' discussion in the comments section.

Sana's internet experiences mentioned earlier, and her attempts to Skype her family in Auckland, illustrate her desire to maintain relationships with friends and family overseas and the challenges of maintaining them. She has decided what communication platforms she will use and when she will use them. For example, she would send a text to her family in Auckland to share simple but important information; in an emergency she would call (either using the landline or mobile, whichever was at hand) as she felt it was a more immediate form of communication; and Facebook was a public journal for her to share photos and



updates so her family and friends would know how they were doing, without them actually sending an email to ask, or her sending a direct reply with photos attached. She jokingly suggested that you would not post on Facebook if you were sick in bed: "...would you?... That's how you know they're alright -- they've put a post up recently!" Besides cost, the primary limitation that inhibits her communication choices and access social media, such as Facebook, is the time it takes to load her news feed, so much so that some days she doesn't bother to go on Facebook at all. Sione shared information about overcoming issues when streaming YouTube clips. He explained that, "you should use a YouTube clip downloader" rather than try to stream and watch the clip directly from the YouTube site. Once the clip was downloaded he could watch the clip in full, with no lag or break. However, he warned that a one-minute clip could take as much as one hour to download, and there was a possibility of it being cut off and failing completely. He described how he would often set a clip to download overnight, and hope it would be completed by morning.

### **Coming Home – Mitaki's Return and Reconnection**

Apparently there were some Niueans taken by slave traders back in the day... I saw a post that was shared on Facebook – about how there was only ever one man who had escaped and was able to return to Niue... I hadn't heard about it before, but I recognised his name as a family name – He must have been one of my ancestors – my great, great, great, great grandfather, or something.

(Mitaki, late 40s, Niuean resident of New Zealand)

Mitaki articulated “great, great, great...” while throwing back his head in laughter because he was not sure how far this event would have occurred in his family line, and how many ‘greats’ he should use. Mitaki and I met during his visit to the Niue museum while I was volunteering. We got chatting about the displays and artifacts, and his reason for coming to Niue. Mitaki was on his second-last day of a two-week trip and was staying with his aunt and uncle. This was his first time back to Niue since he left more than twenty years ago, and he had spent it re-connecting with old classmates and family. Mitaki had ventured into the national museum because he was hoping to find more information about the ancestor who had been kidnapped by slave traders and travelled the seas so long ago. Although Mitaki said that he had not been interested in Niue culture and history, he explained how his level of engagement had intensified when he saw the posts about his family and cultural heritage. That particular Facebook post about Mitaki’s ancestor piqued his interest in doing further research, which eventually led to his visit to the physical places and spaces of his ‘homeland.’

Mitaki’s experience of Facebook was both a banner and an anchor. He was drawn in by the ‘banner of Niue’ that others were flying online. Facebook then served as an anchor to keep Mitaki’s connection alive enough for him to want to visit Niue after more than twenty years away. Facebook was the gateway to explore his cultural ancestry and a space to maintain different interactions and exchanges. It also fuelled Mitaki’s desire to engage in a deeper relationship with his ancestry, re-forging connections that had not been maintained. These posts allowed Mitaki to participate in a geographically-spread and socially networked-nationalism, and find a love for ‘home.’

Mitaki and I spoke in depth about how he had become more and more engaged with Niue's history and culture since there had been "a lot of stuff put on Facebook," including old photos, excerpts from history books and missionary journals, as well as photos from events and special occasions. Mitaki was ashamed to say that until recently there were many aspects of Niue's history that he had no clue about, nor had he any real interest in them. Mitaki believed that his story of 'return and re-connection' and his search for 'home' started in the digital-scapes of Facebook and blog posts, and eventually to visiting Niue. For Mitaki, a Facebook post was a trigger to explore and re-connect with his family, history, and cultural identity. Mitaki's decision to go back to Niue was propelled by a personal determination to negotiate an identity that he felt was his claim, but had neglected. The Facebook posts Mitaki had been viewing from New Zealand were the impetus for his return to Niue—a 'coming home,' spiritually and physically.

I discussed the theme of returning home with another participant, Ruth. Ruth is a mother of three and works in the education sector in Auckland. She introduced herself to me as half Tongan and half Niuean. Her husband is Tongan, and she had been to Tonga several times but had never been to Niue:

No [I haven't been to Niue], but I want to, I would like to go for my 40th birthday... I don't have any direct family in Niue, but I know there would be extended family there... I can't wait to go hunt some Ugas (coconut crabs)!

At this point it [Niue] would be a holiday destination for me, I'm quite content to stay in Auckland, but for me ... I can imagine, going, falling in love with the place and having to go there every year or something.

Ruth's relationship to Niue and her Niuean heritage is distant and she is somewhat uncertain if she ever will visit Niue because all her Niuean relatives had migrated to New Zealand. However, she mentioned that she would love to go as a holiday treat for her next birthday, but in the same statement is also reflexive about the emotional connection she feels she should already have with the island. For her, it is more than a holiday destination. Being in love with Niue is the 'heart' that nation-making activities aim to cultivate in Niueans who are ambivalent towards Niue and Niuean culture.

Although Ruth is not currently actively deepening her appreciation for Niuean heritage and culture, she does have a desire for her children to know more:

I do wish I could help [my kids] understand their heritage a lot more... I think that would be sparked off by going there... And keep that connection, and then I would be more serious about having them learn the language... and it's good.

Ruth's comments highlight the potential formation of an emotional connection to the island and culture if they were to visit there. She feels that this connection would be a good thing for her children to have. The connection to 'home,' the physical place of Niue, would then be not just an ephemeral one that is known only through stories told to them by their mother and grandmother – nor a

YouTube instructional video of how to carve a canoe. Although digital media has influence in the *being* verses *belonging* negotiation, Ruth believes the ephemeral must be joined with the physical in order to really gain that sense of *belonging*. Similar to Mitaki's desire to take a trip and visit the physical places and spaces of Niue. The digital experience and exploration of his Niuean-ness was only part of his 'coming home.'

### **Bridging, Belonging, and Digital Transnationalism**

This research investigates the relationship between ICT infrastructures and the socio-political and historical assemblages that shape today's methods of exchange and experiences of digital transnationalism. I focus on the ways in which the rise in migration and transnationalism have fostered a rise in the need to mediate relationships across distances—Niue nation-making efforts 'from below.' Due to the socio-economic, political and ICTD history of Niue and its changing communicative ecologies are determining the daily decisions that Niueans are making on the mode, the means, and the meaning of their communications. My informants consumed and produced content on digital media (from 'below') as a way to emotionally connect with ideas and memories of Niue and co-construct what it means to be Niuean. Several respondents and I discussed how they may have 'liked' a picture of her cousins trip to the island, or of their nephew's participation in Polyfest; and how this digital content became a connection to their sense of *being* Niuean and or *belonging* to the Niuean transnational social field.

The power of media to facilitate community engagement was evident when observing Niuean nation-making and preservation activities on Facebook. For example, on Facebook, local, place-based communities were both represented and extended through the social media platform. The majority of these communities had made Facebook pages that group people along village and or family lines, as I will demonstrate below. These are examples of nation-making and nation-extending on Facebook. Facebook also provided a space for transnational communication and relationship mediation. Furthermore, it is a means to promote events and workshops, as well as a place to hold public discussions about language, culture, and tradition. The Niuean Facebook pages have an online forum similar to the KB online forum (Lee, 2003) and they can be seen as similar spaces. There are several Facebook groups and pages that connect and link Niueans and those who want to be associated with Niue. These pages catalogue aspects of Niue sociality by village, family lineage, sports group, community group, and so on. Each Facebook page explicitly describes its purpose, intent, and target audience. For example, one Facebook group explains that their page is a virtual “cyber-village” space that connects those who still live on the island with those who have moved away, yet still want to be connected to their hometown of Alofi, Avatele, Mutalau, etcetera. Another is a “family page for sharing.” ‘Real-world’ manifestations of these allegiances can be found in the pews of the Niuean churches in Auckland. As one respondents in Auckland described it, “We all sit in our villages, then as part of the service, we each have to either sing a song or something...” These already ascribed communities and groupings are thus extended, rehearsed, and facilitated by Facebook and other digital media.

What follows are some more ethnographic examples of Niuean digital transnationalism: A village Facebook page, a hashtag campaign and the rise in digital content to teach the Niuean history and culture.

### **Avatele Loud and Proud:**

Avatele is a village on the south-east part of the island and is famous for having one of the few beaches in Niue. The '*Avatele Loud and Proud*' Facebook page had 889 members at the time this screen shot was taken (November 2015).



Figure 48 - Screen-shot of Avatele Loud and Proud Facebook page

These members consist of a combination of those who currently live in Avatele, those who are from Avatele yet now live overseas, and those who may have married someone originally from Avatele.

In mid-August of 2013, a new ride-on lawn mower and edger was ceremoniously presented to the Avatele Village Council to help maintain the village green. This is an example of the material productivity possible of digitally mediated relations and the way village and kinship relations are extended transnationally. The need for a mower and edger was raised and debated on the '*Avatele Loud and Proud*' Facebook page at the beginning of the year. As a result, funds were received by 'Avatele' donors in New Zealand and Australia. These moneys were also combined with funds from the Niue Tourism office for the procurement and shipment of the tools.

The '*Avatele Loud and Proud*' page features a photo of the Avatele village green. The image depicts the church building framed by a sunset sky, coconut trees, and freshly cut lawns. It is a page that uses the geographic starting point of Avatele, a village on the island of Niue, to cast a transnational net to include those residing overseas. The page description is as follows:

This is not just a group, it is a village, OUR cyber-village. A place in cyberspace that can enable all Avatele people from across the globe to connect and keep in touch. If you identify yourself as a person from or linked to Avatele, Niue Island – feel free to join and add your other Avatele friends and families to the group!



Real-world village ties are maintained and extended via digital media and the affordances of a Facebook page.

The Facebook page shows how the distinction between 'real world' relations and 'online' affiliations can blur. Although interactions are played out 'online,' they are broader and more complexly connected than singular, linear allegiances or physicalities (Pertierra, 2012; Boellstorff, 2008). This can also be seen in the idea of 'multiple memberships.' Some Niueans, in addition to being 'Avatele loud and proud,' also identify themselves to 'Niue' as a whole. In addition to 'liking' the Avatele page they also 'liked' the 'Niue Island' page as well as one of the other pages set up like the 'Proud to be Niuean' page. Although the village that your family comes from is a major part of Niuean identity construction, it was common for Niueans to connect on both a village and national level, as well as a Pacific region level as well. At the time of my fieldwork, the 'Niue Island' page had 5,646 members, which not only consisted of Niueans both on and off the island, but also included some visitors and tourists who desired to remain connected to the island. These online memberships depict Niueans and their transnational spread; however, they are not a full representation of the Niuean diaspora. From online observations I noted interactions with the growing Niuean communities in Australia, the United States, and Canada. Although a Niue Facebook page cannot provide complete details of Niue's diasporic spread, Facebook has become but one platform to develop kinship links and their visibility and maintenance.

## #KiMuaNiue (Niue to the front):

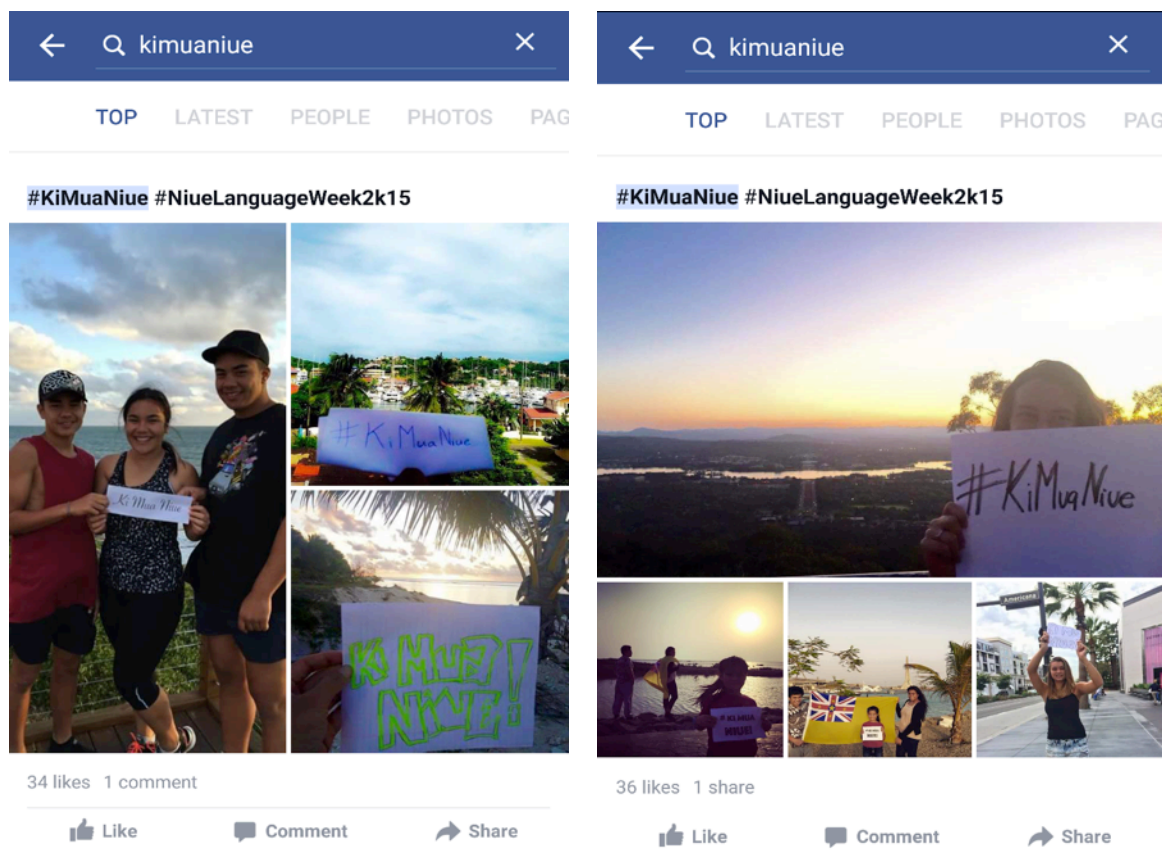


Figure 49 - Screen-shot of #KiMuaNiue on Facebook

Another dynamic example is the #KiMiuNiue campaign. This was a digital media rally cry to Niuean communities all over the world that coincided with the Niue Language Week in New Zealand in October of 2015, an annual event that started several years ago. Niue Language Week is one of several 'language weeks,' which is a Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (NZ) initiative. The Niuean transnational community were encouraged to tweet and upload to Facebook with the hashtag *KiMuaNiue*. The phrase is similar to the French and Spanish 'viva', as in *viva la France*, to extol the prosperity and success of Niue—a sharing of their pride and passion for Niue.

Throughout the #KiMiuNiue campaign, Niueans in Niue, New Zealand, and all over the world shared their images, tweets, and posts in participation. Above are some images curated from a search of #kimuaniue on Facebook. The Niuean nationalistic Facebook pages and #KiMuaNiue are examples of digital preservation efforts of the Niuean transnational social field. The images that were shared from Niue showcase the natural beauty of the island, highlighting the benefit and advantage of living on a Pacific island—the idyllic landscape, laid-back lifestyle, and the idea of essentially living in paradise. Posts uploaded from other parts of the globe focused on declaring their pride about coming from the tiny island of Niue, even if they were now living in Paris or studying in Dunedin. These posts also reinforced the broader nation-making agendas used to keep Niuean language and culture alive.

### **Our Niue is Calling You:**

Another example of Niuean digital transnationalism and the ‘call’ for Niueans all over the world is the following screen shot of a Facebook post by Nisa, a social media entrepreneur. Nisa was born in Niue, but moved to Auckland with her family as a child. She grew up removed from other Niueans as she didn’t live close to her direct relatives, and her family didn’t attend a traditional Niuean church. As a result, she sheepishly admitted that her command of the Niuean language was lacking, although she could understand what was spoken. Nisa became a participant and she was part of a large number of Niuean language and culture events we both attended. Nisa was interested in the social media and ICT part of this research focus as she was developing a social media presence.



Figure 50 – Screen shot of “OUR Niue is calling you” Facebook post

The image above (Figure 50) is a screen shot that Nisa posted, re-appropriating Beni’s #niuelife and #paradise posts (Beni is first introduced in Chapter Three). The text that accompanied this post is as follows:

OUR Niue is calling you ☺ ...Keeping up with OUR man V Niue (referring to the *Man vs Wild* television show) ...who truly epitomizes living off the land and he wants to encourage Niueans living abroad to go back home! This post shows him

with the spoils of fishing on a traditional canoe and uga (coconut crab) hunting with his siblings 😊

With Beni's permission Nisa took several of Beni's photos and added her own commentary, aptly describing Beni's post as Niue "calling you."

Another iteration of this kind of 'call' can be seen in Figure 51. It is a video post from a resident of Niue, Samson, reminding the Niueans living overseas of the hard work it is to clear the land to plant crops.



Figure 51 – Screen shot of another 'call' Facebook post

Alongside the video footage of him and his brother clearing the scrub, he added text, as follows:

How many Niueans living overseas miss doing this? Not many I guess. Our forefathers build this nation on the back of hard work and sacrifice and we should always embrace our true identity as Niueans 🦵👍😊🌱👏

#islandlife #niueisland #bushlife #hardwork #goodworkout #mouihemotu #mouiniue

Samson takes the opportunity to commentate on what he believes it means to be Niuean: honouring the hard work and sacrifice of their forefathers, which allows him to enjoy the #islandlife, #bushlife, and a blessed Niue today. His question on whether Niueans living overseas miss doing the back-breaking labour of clearing the land is light-hearted jab at those who now live a lifestyle in urban areas, who buy their taro from the local store rather than harvest it from their family plantation. Samson's post is aimed at those who remember doing that themselves when they used to live on the island, but also those who would have never put their hand to a machete or shovel. By showcasing an aspect of Niuean culture and lifestyle, Samson is putting out a 'call' to his transnational social field to once again embrace their *belonging* if they have forgotten it, or for the first time, if they never had it.

### **A Digital Discovery of Niuean History:**

I'm half Niuean... So My mum's full Niuean, but she spent most of her life in Samoa... and there's history - she left Niue with my gran... but somehow they

ended up in Samoa... and that's why she grew up speaking Samoan... and grew up in a village called 'ae Niue'... which is a Niuean village in Samoa - it's still in Samoa... So that's my family village... but it's either half breeds like me, or full Niueans that live there. However, I'm not too sure if today a lot of them speak Niuean in that village - but my gran is here now in NZ - my mums, mum... same thing - full Niuean, lives Niuean, speaks Niuean... But spent some of her life in Samoa, so that's how she learnt to speak Samoan.

Mum ended up marrying my dad, who was from a village not too far from there... and then they ended up moving here (NZ). And so obviously embedded in the Samoa culture... my dad was full Samoan-German, my mum is the Niuean-Chinese... And so coming to NZ they had the Samoan culture more... and that's how we grew up - in that culture... Because of that I don't know very much about the Niue history... It's more just stuff off the net, and things... and what people tell me...

(Toa, late 30s, Pastor, Samoan-Niuean resident of Auckland)

Toa's personal history of Niue migration has meant that he is not very familiar with Niuean history. He had learnt some aspects of his ancestry from internet searches, and from what he had been told over the years by friends and family. Toa does not actively pursue this research daily. His accumulation of knowledge of Niuean history and culture via digital media has been sporadic, yet sustained over many years. He learnt about Niuean history and mythology from watching YouTube videos and following posts on Facebook. Figures 52 to 54 are examples of educational resources recently put up online. Some of which Toa had viewed and learnt from.





Figure 52 - Screenshot of YouTube teaching Niuean legend



Figure 53 - Screenshot of 'how to' YouTube for a Niuean delicacy



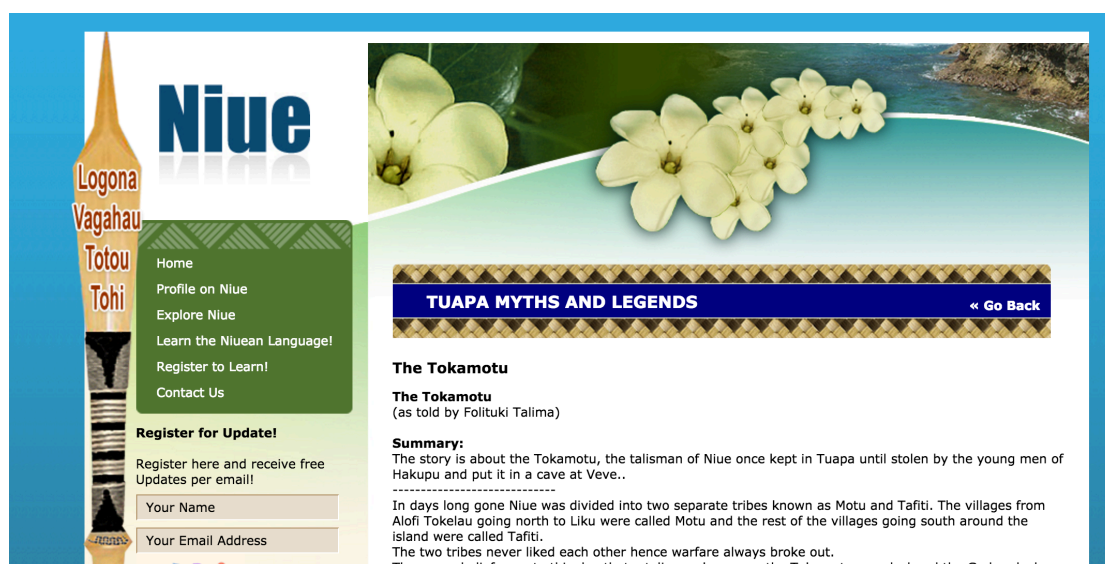


Figure 54 - Screenshot of website on Niue language and history

Much of the pre-European history of Niue was largely un-documented in written form, and passed down through word of mouth and storytelling. These oral traditions mean that until recently there was little material found on library shelves or internet searches, making it difficult to be able to learn about and understand the history and culture of the Niue people. Pulekula (1903) and Loeb (1926) were early researchers who wrote about their experiences in Niue. They documented information about Niuean history, transcribing the stories and legends passed down through the generations to their research participants. Pulekula and Loeb's work was the first attempt to collate and record the myths, legends, and cultural practices of the Niue people. Loeb recognised that Pacific Island cultures relied on oral traditions and rituals to perpetuate legends and myths, remember the significance of events, and disseminate appropriate societal protocols such as expectations of reciprocity and hospitality. However, over the subsequent years, several books and educational resources have been

published to document Niue history and culture. Pulekula (1903), Loeb (1926), Smith (1983), and Thomson (1984) produced early works about Niuean social structures and their influence on the immigration of people from both eastern and western Polynesian cultures (i.e. Tonga and Samoa). These accounts are a combination of travellers' journals and ships' logs as well as the transcription of myths and legends told by the elders of Niue. These logs and excerpts are now commonly remediated on Facebook and YouTube with other historical documents, news articles and old family photos.

Both Toa and Mitaki shared how digital media had sparked an interest in a heritage and ancestry which they had initially not fully engaged with until older in life. Nationalistic social media posts and documentary style videos on YouTube shaped a shift from *being* to more of a sense of *belonging* and ownership of their Niuean-ness. Figure 55 gives two examples of the kinds of historical posts which Toa, Mitaki and the Niuean transnational social field are 'consuming' via Facebook. The posts share aspects of Niuean history, aims to educate, and stir ceremony and nostalgia. The 'Niue Family Page for Sharing' is one of the pages which was circulating excerpts from old books and journals. The page has a mixture of historical posts as well as current affairs and events.



Figure 55 - Screenshot of Facebook posts on Niue history

During my fieldwork I observed how many Niueans used the ease of content distribution to target and engage discussion around Niue’s history and tradition. They shared the limited historical and ethnographic work as a means of educating the transnational social field. Similarly, in creating YouTube documentary style work, they also aimed to construct and document Niuean-ness in a new way, for similar aims.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated the ways that Niuean ‘nation making’ activities and notions of Niuean identity and culture are negotiated, extended, and amplified on and through digital media. For contextual background, in Chapter Three I first discussed the historical background for a prevalent digital literacy and enablement in Niue that has resulted in the communicative ecologies allowing

much of the Niuean digital transnationalism depicted in this Chapters Six and Seven. It is evident from this research on Niueans that Niuean identity construction in the transnational social field is experienced and mediated by the use of ICTs and social media in both local and transnational communication. Mitaki had shared how his level of engagement intensified as he saw posts about his family and cultural heritage. Those posts resulted in his culture becoming more important to him. That particular Facebook post piqued Mitaki's interest in doing further research for himself, and led to his visit to the physical places and spaces of his 'homeland.'

Mitaki gives us an example of a personal search for identity resulting in a desire to engage in a deeper relationship with his ancestry, re-forging the ancestral connections that may have been maintained. Mitaki and I spoke further on how he had become more and more engaged with Niue's history and culture since there had been "a lot of stuff put on Facebook," including old photos, excerpts from history books and missionary journals, and photos from events and special occasions. A lot of things, Mitaki was ashamed to say, he had no clue about, nor had any real interest in, until recently. The Facebook posts Mitaki had been viewing from New Zealand developed the impetus for his return to Niue—a 'coming home,' both physically and spiritually. My informants consumed and produced content on digital media as a way to emotionally connect with what it means to be Niuean.

Throughout my research, my participants were engaging in the strategic ways to not only maintain transnational relationships, but also differentiate and

celebrate Niuean identity; some of which have been facilitated and expanded via digital media. Digital transnationalism is the use of digital media as part of a suite of nationalistic motives; which occur 'from above,' in government or organisational initiatives, and 'from below' in day to day interactions and communication. It is the performative practice of transnationalism, as fostered by digital media environments. Digital media thus brings new ways of being and belonging to one's Niuean-ness. Digital media are helping to constitute and negotiate transnational identities. It not only makes the participation of Niuean cultural identity more convenient in transnational communication, but also makes nationalistic statements more public and visible on digital media platforms. Digital Media also influences ways in which people choose to express their 'being' and or 'belonging' to their Niuean-ness, as well as express sentiments of what that means.

By researching the digital transnationalism of my research participants it is evident that Niue related posts, tweets and hashtags allow Niueans to create and participate in a geographically-spread and networked-nationalism, and a love for 'home.' My informants consumed and produced content on digital media as a way to emotionally connect with ideas and memories of Niue and what it means to be Niuean. Whether this was a picture that of their cousins trip to the island, or their younger sister's participation in Polyfest, it was a connection to their sense of *being* Niuean, but more significantly, *belonging* to and owning their Niuean-ness. When Niueans engage in digital media to watch videos shot in their homeland or 'like' their uncle's Facebook profile picture of the Niuean flag, they

feel that they are participating in the cultural maintenance of Niue; at least in their own heart.

Research participants demonstrated how ICTs enable a new type of ecosystem of exchange that spans the here and there, the now and the timeless, in both presence and absence (constructing a 'co-presence', as discussed by Ito et al. [2005]). The genesis of a transnational social field is the 'extension' or 'stretching' of relational and kinship connections across often large distances through the physicality of migration. Yeoh et al. (2005) investigate the informal networks, special imaginaries, and intimacies of transnational familial dynamics. They note that remittance 'flows' and 'circuits' of care and affection are often facilitated by easier mobilities and communications. Social and familial bonds are maintained, developed, avoided; emotion and affections are experienced; memories are 'made,' identities are negotiated, and all this takes place *alongside* and *through* ICTs.

Although on the one hand Niue's historical relationship seems innovative and futuristic, during fieldwork in 2013-2014 the slow internet speeds also frustrated people's imaginings of a fast-paced connectivity with the rest of the world. Yet despite these speed limitations, a high level of digital literacy and access remained. This, coupled with a rise in personal ICT use and mobile phone ownership in Niue, meant that Niueans were actively engaging in a kind of transnational nationalism, primarily via digital media. Niueans were using digital media to both communicate their love for their nation and as a call for others who no longer live in Niue to engage with Niue nationalistic discourses, to have

their own 'coming home' experience. Niueans are hashtagging, liking, and sharing along nationalistic themes. The themes of 'coming home,' of communication, connection, and cultural identification, are prevalent in the digital media posts observed during fieldwork and presented in this thesis.

Undercurrents of transnationalism and cultural identity underpin the notions of Niuean identity that were being constructed across the transnational social field. This research highlights how digital media have enabled a new type of ecosystem of exchange, constructing a co-presence (as discussed by (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998)) and co-constructions of Niuean identity. This chapter presented examples of how nostalgic longings for 'home' manifest in Niueans' participation in different aspects of long-distance nationalism. These efforts are mediated through mobiles, ICTs, and social media to communicate with family and friends overseas. By extension, Niuean co-present nationalism is occurring between the small island developing state of Niue and the diasporic migrant communities in Auckland, and is enabled through online collaboration and community-making on social networking sites such as Facebook.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

*“YNKNW you know more Te reo Maori than your own language”*

*“YNKNW when everyone the party feeds their car before their face”*

(posts on the ‘You Know You’re Niuean When...’ Facebook page)

Niue is one of the least documented islands in the Pacific. As a case study for digital transnationalism, this thesis not only contributes to the the small number of ethnographic investigations of Niue, but it is also the first qualitative research conducted on the influence of digital media on Niuean transnationalism and identity construction. My research is a unique and original contribution to scholarship which identifies a growing overlap in themes of ‘transnationalism’ and ‘the digital’ and the ‘gap’ that has developed in the way in which to research such a confluence of themes.

This thesis has explored how digital media is impacting the construction(s) of Niuean identity and culture through a multi-sited, multi-method study of Niueans in Auckland and Niue. It examined how Niueans negotiate their sociality



within a transnational social field that is focused upon the maintenance and revitalisation of their cultural identity. It is a study of Niuean transnationalism and what Niueans think it means to be 'Niuean', with attention to how *being* and *belonging* to their Niuean-ness is extended in and through digital media. I argue that the phenomenon of transnationalism is facilitated and amplified in new ways that are only possible through affordances cultivated in the digital media environments, an important space for Niuean identity formation.

Niueans have built, and continue to build, a transnational social field between Niue and Auckland out of a desire to maintain kinship ties and familial bonds. Niueans have developed a fear of a loss of culture, both on the island and in the multi-cultural urban setting of Auckland. They thus share the burden of 'preserving' Niue. Although these 'threats' have been a concern for many years, transnational communication and social media platforms have recently allowed Niueans to engage in this negotiation in dynamic, iterative ways. This thesis explored how these frameworks in identity negotiation have been supported by a growing engagement with ICTs and new media, what I refer to as Niuean digital transnationalism.

I have focused on the relationship of ICT infrastructures and how socio-political and historical assemblages shape instances of exchange. The rise in migration and transnationalism has fostered a rise in the need to mediate relationships across distances. The Niuean digital transnationalism as discussed in this thesis are examples of Niue nation-making efforts from 'above', 'below,' in-between, and from afar. As such, it is evident that digital transnationalism is enabled

through, and embedded in, the affordances of transnational communication tools and new media platforms. Digital media supports and enhances this phenomenon of a kind of nationalism from 'below,' and a nationalism from afar. These questions are increasingly important as Niuean identity is negotiated in more than one geographically bounded location, including the small island developing state of Niue and the diasporic migrant communities in Auckland, as well as through increased online activity.

In Chapters Three and Four I started by introducing Niue, dubbed 'The Rock of Polynesia,' a small island developing state that has a particular set of development challenges that cultivates a desire for 'preservation.' Chapter Four focused on the cultural reproduction of Niuean culture and identity from 'above' and 'below,' 'across' and 'in-between.' 'Above' refers to the government- and NGO-organised workshops and events aimed at fuelling economic and civic development, while 'below' refers to the influence of day-to-day interactions via transnational communication 'between' friends and family. All of these terms help to contextualise the motivations that have cultivated the ethnographic examples of Niuean digital transnationalism in the thesis.

Niueans ask how Niue's economic viability and livability be maintained if it is left to die out? But also, how would Niue's unique language and culture be kept alive if not for intentional intervention? How secure is Niue's future if left to the hands of a nation (transnationally spread) who do not do something about it? Those Niueans who desire to maintain the Niue culture and identity wish all Niueans to band together and build together. Surprisingly, preservation initiatives were

highly prevalent on the island as it was off. Kai Niue and the Arts Festival were concerted efforts towards cultural revitalisation. Similarly, efforts in Auckland are as much about maintaining the physical place of Niue as much as the nostalgic symbolism of it. Preventing Niue from 'dying out' is being attempted through keeping transnational connections alive in personal communication with family and friends, as well as in overtly nationalistic endeavours such as gaining government funding for language classes, cultural arts workshops, and the participation in pan-Pacific cultural festivals.

Furthermore, Chapter Three mapped the communicative assemblages and infrastructures that Niueans in Niue engage with, which thus allow the performance of 'preservation agendas' via digital media. This section of the thesis contextualised the socio-economic and ICTD history of Niue and the changing communicative ecologies of the nation. This contextualisation is important as these infrastructures determined the daily decisions that Niueans were making on their mode, means, and meaning of their communication—the performative practice of digital transnationalism.

Due to the rise in personalised ICT use and mobile phone ownership in Niue, Niueans are actively engaging in a kind of nationalistic activism via social media (made more accessible via smart-phones). My respondents achieve this both indirectly within day-to-day relational mediation in Facebook messages and emails, as well as in nationalistic status updates, tweets, selfies, likes, and shares. One aspect of these digital interactions work to maintain emotional connections with the many Niueans living abroad, nurturing a 'heart' for 'home,' resulting in

an increase in return visits, facilitating family reunions, and even sparking reverse migration.

To further highlight this transnational relationship, Chapter Five delved into Auckland as another site for 'home' for Niueans and for the construction and preservation of Niuean identity and culture. One aspect of this research is the personal experience of *being* Niuean. I examined being Niuean and being transnational in terms of people's mobility, relational connections across the seas, the promotion and preservation of *Tāoga Niue* (the Niue culture) among the diasporic community in Auckland, and collaborative work between Niueans in Auckland and Niueans in Niue to maintain a viable living society on Niue island. For Niueans in Auckland, despite living in New Zealand, their emotional connection to Niue and the preservation of traditions and culture were negotiated in several spaces: language, arts, and education. In Auckland I met people young and old who saw themselves as both Niuean and New Zealander. These Niuean-Aucklanders were very reflexive regarding what that meant to them and how it played out in their day-to-day lives. I also discovered that because of the Niue narrative in New Zealand, less and less are 'full blooded' Niueans, and so much so they called themselves a 'fruit salad' of ethnicities.

Many of the people I spoke with almost always defined their identity with fractions of their ethnic make-up. For example, 'I am half Niuean, half *palagi*; I am quarter Tongan, quarter Samoan, and half Niuean'. Natasha's example in Chapter Five highlights that there is a sense of 'loss of culture' that, if protracted over several generations, could mean the disappearance of the Niuean culture and

language. Because of this tension there is a growing movement of Niueans who desire to fight the possibility that the Niuean language and culture will “die out”. Several described a sense of being lost or confused about ‘who they are’ and ‘where they come from,’ which seemed to impact their sense of direction and where they felt they were ‘going’ as a whole. These Niueans all echoed the sentiment of a ‘loss of identity’ in the upcoming generation. They each addressed this in their own ways, but they expressed that they believed that a connection to one’s cultural heritage was a part of the answer to combat this.

During fieldwork my interlocutors expressed the felt need to ‘preserve’ their culture and traditions, and saw participation in events such as Polyfest as part of this process. Using Polyfest as an example, Chapter Six attempted to elucidate the relationship between the transnational activities and the role of ‘the digital.’ After underscoring the cultural significance of Polyfest as a real-world event with its own power and influence, I then focused on the co-construction of meaning, which was happening in Polyfest, as a digital media event. Experiencing Polyfest as a digital media event has been a means to extend, negotiate, and articulate a personal sense of pride and belonging to their Niuean-ness. Polyfest is a space of Niuean ritual and pilgrimage in shaping Niuean identity and culture. It is amplified as a digital media event, shaping ideas about belonging, culture, and identity that is a subset of Niuean digital transnationalism. Whether experienced first-hand or as a digital media event, it is a space where Niueans who are not pro-active in their *belonging*, can belong, even for the few moments during which they view performances at Polyfest.

Due to the political partnership between New Zealand and Niue, Niueans are also New Zealander passport holders. This allows ease of migration to New Zealand, and has thus resulted in a large and growing diaspora in Auckland. Chapter Seven brought greater focus onto the transnational influences from below and in-between, particularly through the maintenance of digital community and transnational communication. This chapter illustrated the ways that digital media and transnational communication facilitate and build a sense of belonging, community, and identity, with these themes culminating in ethnographic examples of Niuean nation-making on Facebook. It is apparent that Niueans are demonstrating forms of transnationalism and nationalism from a distance, aimed at preserving Niuean culture and identity in both Niue and Auckland, partly occurring on social media and new media platforms. This has been aided by the ICTD and public WiFi history of Niue, and has resulted in a foundation of high digital literacy and ubiquitous uptake of ICTs and social media. This has contributed to an ease of transnational communication between Niueans no longer living in their ancestral land and their friends and family who have remained in Niue. These communicative assemblages reinforce and expand the transnational social field. This has also resulted in a more visible negotiation of what it means to be Niuean, what that looked like in Auckland, and how it manifests in their location(s) of 'home.'

In Chapter Seven I first discussed the ways digital media has been used to frame a sense of nostalgia and 'home' as part of personal identity construction. I then gave examples of how Niueans are using digital media to communicate a love for 'home' and as a call for others to have their own 'coming home' experience. I

discussed the several Facebook groups and pages that connect and link Niueans who choose to be associated to Niue in one way or another. These Facebook pages catalogue aspects of Niuean sociality by village, family lineage, sports group, community group, and so on. The themes of ‘coming home,’ of communication, connection, and cultural identification are prevalent in the Facebook posts I have observed throughout my fieldwork.

Niueans attempting to define and de-construct what it means to be Niuean, and these discussions are extended, amplified, and co-constructed in and through digital media. Examples of this are the many Niuean Facebook groups that link Niueans from all over the world to their homeland. These group pages are examples of nation-making and nation-extending and digital transnationalism. Facebook provides a space for transnational communication, acts as a means to promote events and workshops, and is a place to hold public discussions about language, culture, and tradition. These pages catalogue aspects of Niue sociality by village, family lineage, sports group, community group, and so on, with each Facebook page blurb explicitly demarcating their purpose, intent, and target audience.

## **Digital Transnationalism**

Digital transnationalism investigates the intersection of transnationality and digital media, and the growing and normative practice of relationship mediation and nationalistic politicking via ICTs due to migration; and of course this phenomenon has been enabled by the increased ease of ICT access and acquisition of smartphones. As such, Digital media has significantly impacted the

construction(s) of Niuean identity and culture over the last ten to fifteen years. ICTs and social media's primary influence has been as a platform, infrastructure and environment for Niuean sociality to not only take place but be transformed. Due to the transnational nature of being Niuean, the ability for communication and relationship mediation has been a considerable factor in the development of a transnational co-construction of Niuean-ness. Throughout my research, my participants were engaging in strategic ways to not only maintain transnational relationships, but also differentiate and celebrate Niuean identity; efforts facilitated and expanded via digital media. My informants consumed and produced content on digital media as a way to emotionally connect with what it means to be Niuean, and cultivate a 'heart' for 'home;' within themselves, and in others'. The performative practice and experiences of transnational identity negotiation in and through 'the digital'—both on an individual and national scale—is what I refer to as digital transnationalism.

Digital transnationalism builds upon Smith and Guarnizo (1998) who investigate the informal networks, special imaginaries, and intimacies of transnational familial dynamics. These may include remittance 'flows' and 'circuits' of care and affection that are often facilitated by easier mobilities and communications. In these settings, social and familial bonds are maintained, developed, avoided, emotion and affections are experienced, memories are 'made,' and identities are negotiated *alongside* and *through* ICTs. ICTs and new media are the environments in which synchronous and asynchronous instances of transnationalism can be developed. The sense of *co-presence*, whether synchronous or not, is practiced within transnational social fields as desired,



between individuals and groups, impacting both private and public spheres. This 'bringing together' of time and space through communication practice facilitates this sense of *co-presence* (being present in the same place, at the same time) between people, regardless of the actuality of distance. ICTs and digital media become the environments in which these instances of relationship mediation and transnational 'nation-building' can be informed, transformed, enacted, and appropriated.

Digital transnationalism also draws upon Madianou and Miller (2012) who have been influential in the development of scholarship on the maintenance of long-distance family relationships through polymedia. Although they examined mother-child relationships, they were not interested in how they were mediated by digital media per se; rather, their research was far more about how the concept of being a proper mother mediated how and why their respondents chose the different communication platforms and assemble the polymedic (Madianou and Miller, 2012) ways of communicating love. ICTs and social media are ways to achieve connection, or as Gershon (2010) describes, disconnection. For my respondents, similarly, Facebook was described as a way to get in touch with and keep up with what's going on in the lives of their friends and family. These online social network platforms were a convenient and inexpensive way to keep in touch.

Each social media site shapes interaction based on the design and the affordances provided by the platform and the environments in which they are used. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on

common interests, or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and the sharing of still and moving images. My respondents navigated this social media terrain, and their desire to connect was achievable as Facebook, Skype, Viber and email supports the maintenance of pre-existing social networks. Others found connection with strangers on platforms which have a different architecture such as Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Regardless, the Niuean sociality I observed and interviewed often connected and clustered around shared interests, political views, or activities: *Niue Ke Monuina* (a prosperous Niue).

My research has demonstrated several ways digital media has supported and extended Niueans' desires to 'preserve' their culture and identity. In approaching my research, it became evident that a major aspect of transnationalism and the Niuean transnational social field is concentrated on Niuean identity construction, which is experienced and mediated by the use of ICTs and digital media, and in both local and transnational communication: both here and there, above, below, and in-between. Many of my respondents were negotiating what it meant to them to be Niuean, especially for those who had never been to Niue. Throughout this thesis I have articulated the relationship between ICT infrastructures and the socio-political and historical assemblages that shape today's methods of exchange amid the Niuean transnational social field.

Digital transnationalism as a concept attends to the ways that digital media interfaces with the politics and daily practice of transnationalism, such as where digital media platforms and their affordances perform the infrastructure, conduit, and materiality of the transnational social field experience. The conceptual framework of digital transnationalism provides the scaffold to understanding how digital media is supporting, extending, and transforming transnational practices relating to communication, coordination, cultural revitalisation, and cultural reproduction. Essentially, digital transnationalism is exemplified in the ways that Niueans are engaging with mobile and digital media in nationalistic ways. Niueans aim to spark and cultivate emotional connections to Niuean identity and culture.

Digital transnationalism encapsulates the research sensitivities of transnationalism from afar, the ethnography of digital media practices, and the multi-sited nature of transnational social fields. It is an analytical lens through which to research transnational identities in an increasingly digital age. This lens impacts the research design, approach, and methodologies; it is the stance in which to approach 'the digital', and the way in which to substantiate the mode, means and meanings of digital media interaction for a transnational person.

Digital transnationalism as research praxis is important to create qualitative research outcomes which do not become overly technocentric, understands the place technology has in transforming transnational sociality, and the power of our sociality on such socio-technological environments. Additional scholarship would be warranted to investigate other cases in addition to Niue. Though

migration and Internet access are generally increasing, the effects they're having are uneven as infrastructure and government policy and localised adaptation will differ. However, despite the differences in communicative assemblage and infrastructural influences, people will still develop workaround solutions to assuage their desire for relational connection and identity maintenance. Further research of other cases would advance and develop the rich potential of digital transnationalism as a new research field.

In my research, digital transnationalism is most exemplified in the ways that Niueans are engaging with ICTs and digital media to build a sense of national identity and belonging. For many Niueans, digital media is more than a way to keep in touch with friends and family, it is also a space to engage with, discuss, and explore identity and culture, strengthening transnational connections; co-constructing and cultivating a 'heart' for 'home'.

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# Appendix

## Human Research Ethics approval:



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)  
Research and Innovation office  
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

### Notice of Approval

Date: **30 July 2013**

Project number: **31/13**

Project title: ***Mediated futures in the South Pacific: An ethnographic investigation of youth, identity and technology in Niue***

Risk classification: **More than low risk**

Investigator: **Dr Heather Horst**

Approved: **From: 30 July 2013 To: 30 June 2016**

#### Terms of approval:

**1. Responsibilities of investigator**

It is the responsibility of the above investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is only valid whilst investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

**2. Amendments**

Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.

**3. Adverse events**

You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

**4. Plain Language Statement (PLS)**

The PLS and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PLS must contain a complaints clause including the above project number.

**5. Annual reports**

Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report.

**6. Final report**

A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

**7. Monitoring**

Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

**8. Retention and storage of data**

The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

**9. Special conditions of approval**

Nil.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

A/Prof Barbara Polus  
Chairperson  
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke (Ethics Officer/HREC secretary), Jennifer Anayo (student researcher).

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